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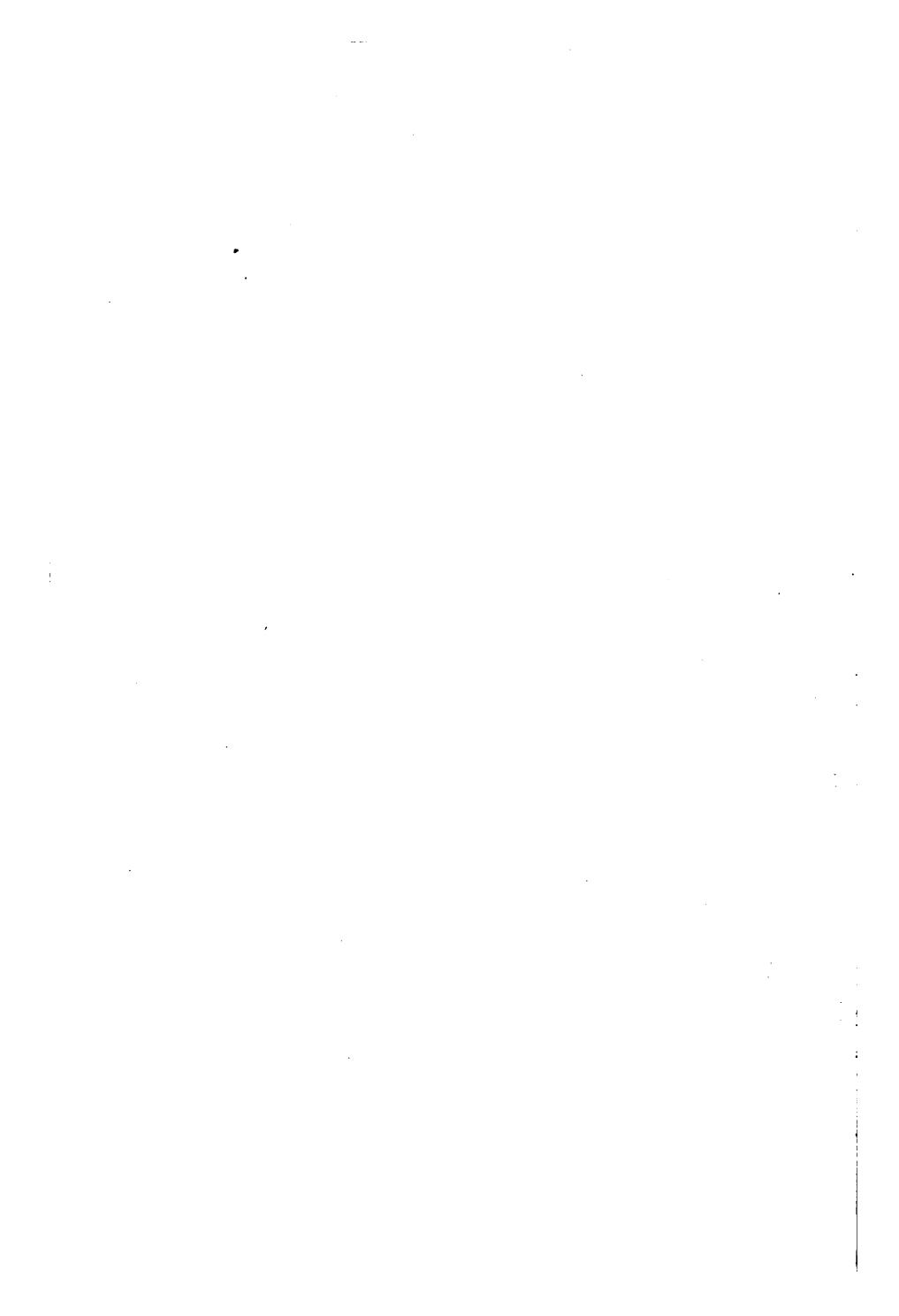
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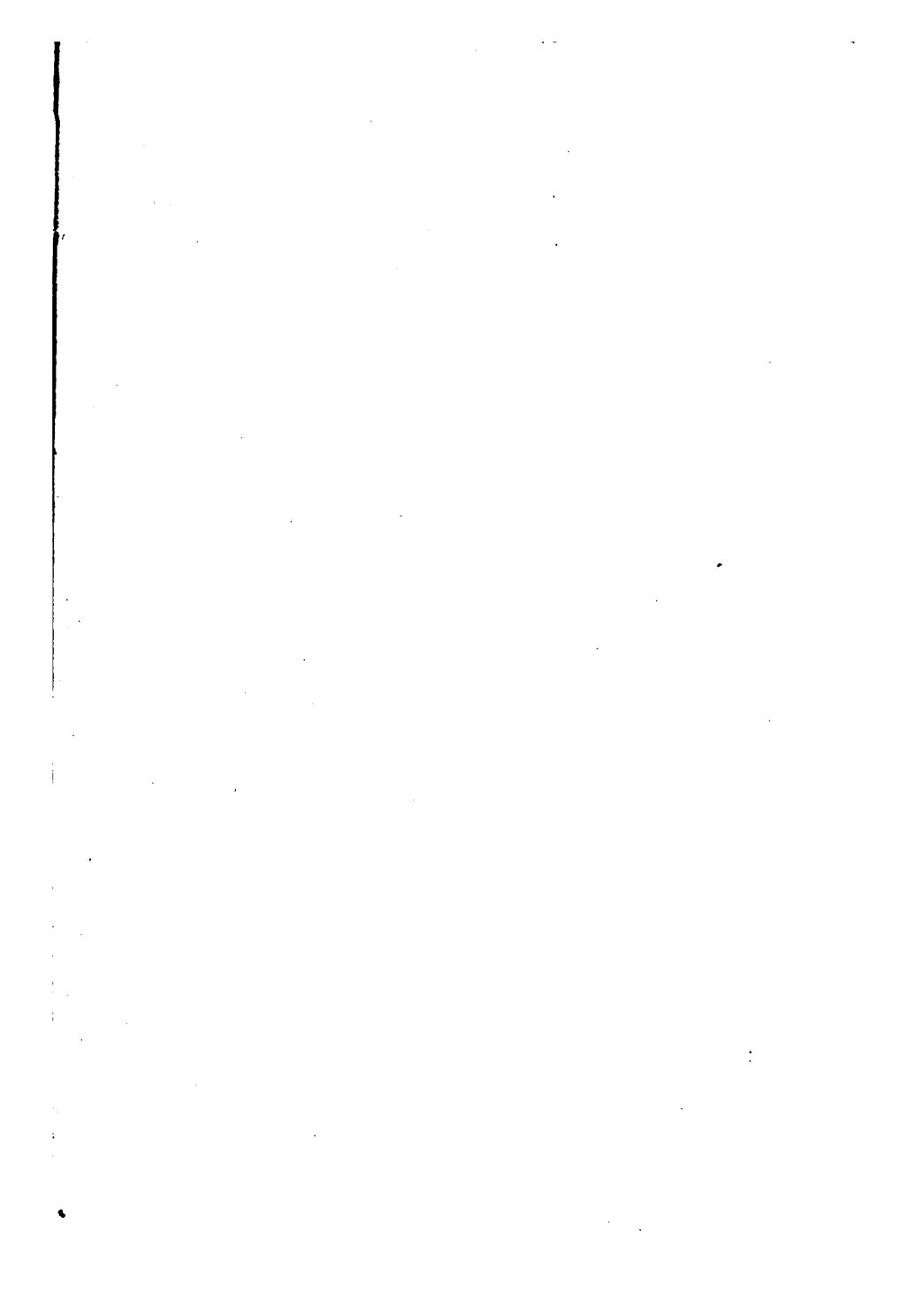
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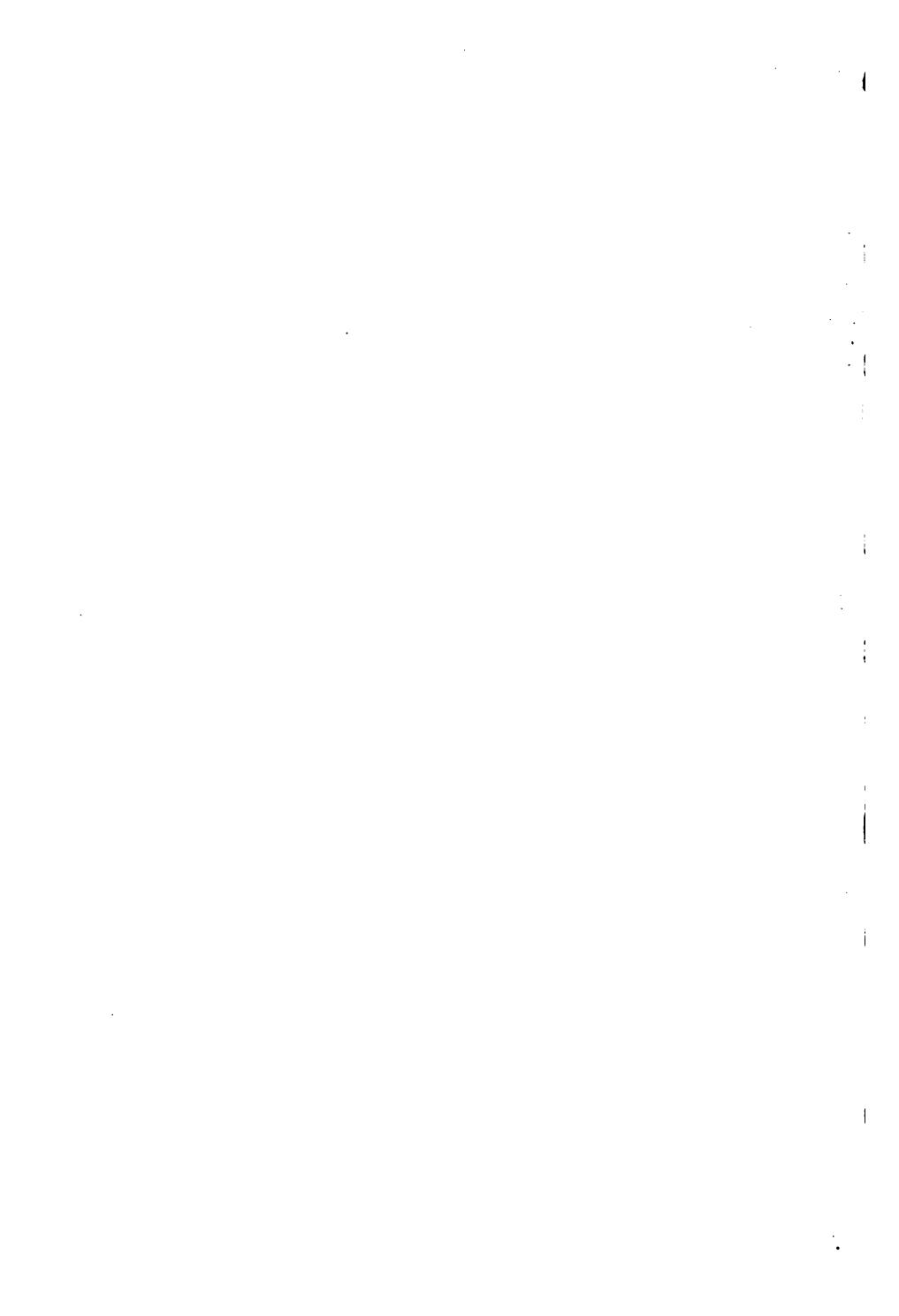
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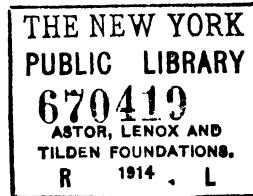
Collected Poems

X

Grace Denio Litchfield



G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1913



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BY
GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD

WILLY WABA
JULIUS
VLAASIL

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

DEDICATION

The bird gives its songs to the day,
The blossom its bloom to the sky,
The fountain out-tosses its spray
As a call to the cloud that goes by.
The star on its glimmering path
Pays toll to the sovereign night
Of the uttermost good that it hath,
In a tribute of tremulous light.

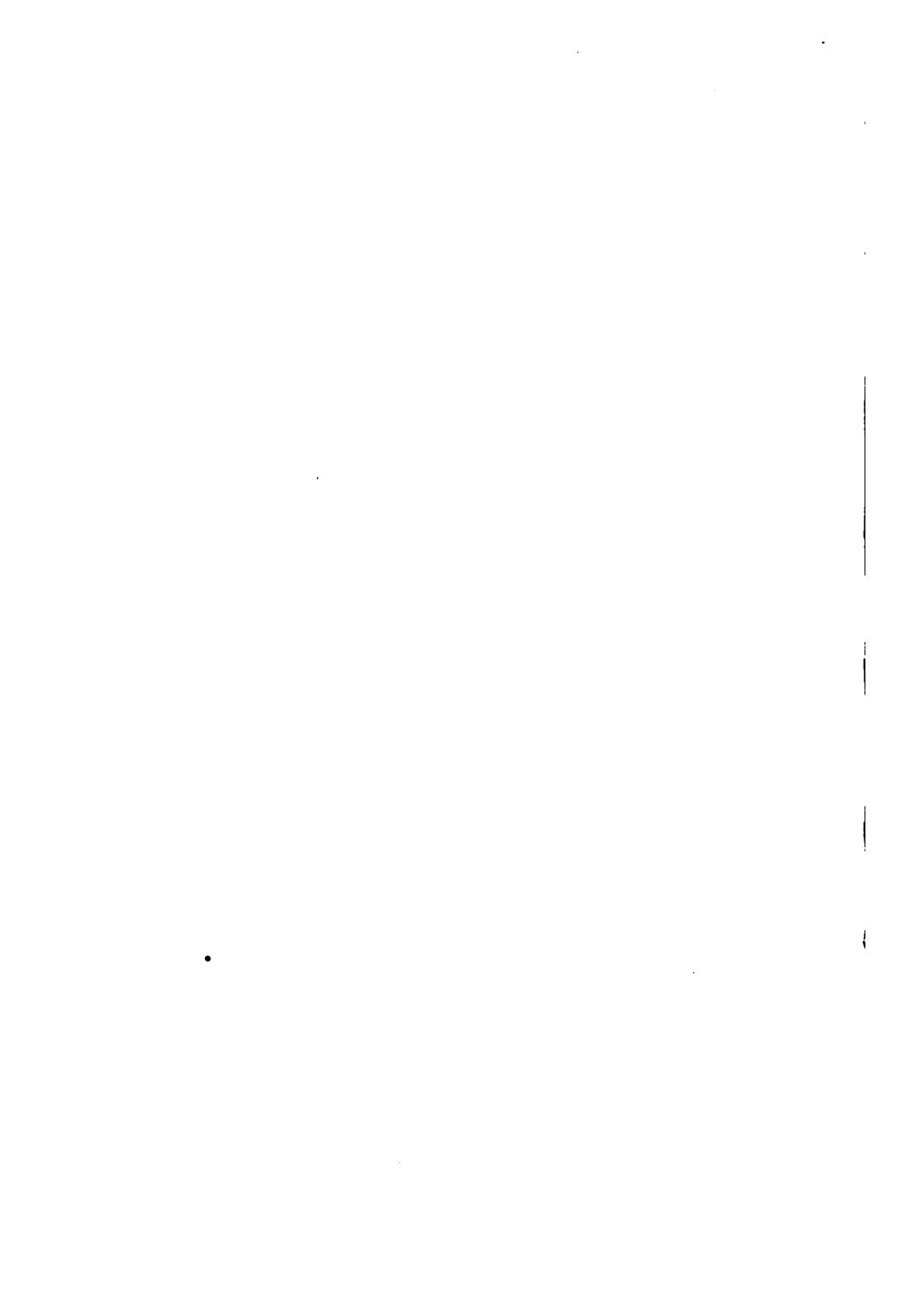
What though the bird's carol be faint,
The blossom be naught but a weed,
And the garb of the fountain be quaint,
And the heavens too distant to heed?
What though the wan gleam of the star
Be lost in the fulness of day?
Evermore to the power afar
Each offers the thing that it may.
So I, like the star and the fount,
The reitulant bird and the flower,
Telling o'er the inadequate count
Of the fruits of my harvesting hour,
Fair to glean what I may from its store
Before the brief reaping-time ends,
With a sigh that the gift be no more,
Lay my sheaf at the feet of my friends.

Many thanks
to you
VIA Rail

Of the poems included in this volume, all save a few of the shorter ones have already appeared in separate editions from time to time since the year 1895, when under the collective title of *Mimosa Leaves* the lyrics were first issued in book form. These various publications, with some trifling omissions from their pages, are here offered to the public as a whole, after a revision which, however careful, remains confessedly inadequate to their needs, yet which it is hoped may plead as an excuse for their re-presentation.

G. D. L.

WASHINGTON,
March, 1913.



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Narcissus

TO

KATHARINE DUMBELL



Narcissus

IN days whose memory the heart yet stirs,
As when at passing breeze o'er forest firs
The whole deep wood melodiously thrills,
There lay within the hollow of three hills
A tiny slumbering lake. Its curvèd edge,
Beyond the whispering rush and nodding sedge,
Was cushioned close with moss more silken soft
Than the enchanted couch whereon, so oft
As winter slew the flowers, Adonis slept,
Re-dreaming spring while Aphrodite wept.
Oaks, broad-limbed as Dodona's magic trees
Or sacred groves of the Eumenides,
Arboured the sward, their branches, dense as
those
That hid the blinded exile from his foes,
So blent in intertwinings manifold
That when noon bathed their crests with fluent
gold
The green net held it fast, save where a few
Bright drops, some loose mesh favouring, broke
through
Upon the dusk, as once on Danae's night
The god of all rained down in drops of light.

Under dew-broidered webs—each morn new-spun

Fair as Penelope's by night undone—

Over the velvet floor, as yet untrod

By hoof of satyr or by foot of god,

A myriad small things crept in and out,

And happy little sounds were all about.

White moths and butterflies on rainbow wings

Crossed and recrossed with fan-like flutterings.

Bees blundered dizzily from blooms to blooms,

Distraught with proffered sweets. Through drowsy glooms

Snakes stretched their jewelled lengths in lines of light,

Harmless as lizards. In the leafy height

Above, the birds, a Bacchanalian crew,

Held rapturous carousal. Drunk with dew,

The lark forgot to soar. The nightingale

Forgot lost Itylus and Procne's tale,

Forgot all else but love. The hunted swallow

Forgot to fly. The hawk forgot to follow.

Guarding this goodly spot three peaks rose up,
Enclosing it as in a jacinth cup

Laid o'er with emeralds. Their lifted brows

Were first to signal when Tithonus' spouse

Stood in the east with sleepy lids dropped low,

Were last to let the golden glory go

When, at day's finish, from his dazzling car

The bright god leaned and flung the reins afar

From off his smoking steeds. And when night
 fell

Sable and silent over hill and dell,
And noiseless through the iron gates and through
The gates of ivory false dreams and true
Stole earthward, while old Somnus far away
Stirred in his poppied sleep and silence lay
Around him as a flame lies round the thing
It feeds on, through the darkness towering—
Near neighbours to the stars, and royally
Invested in the midnight's majesty—
Ossa on Pelion, the peaks looked down,
Wearing the silver moonlight for a crown.
And when in anger or unholy mirth
Jove loosed his blazing tempests on the earth,
And Æolus at his great lord's command
Sent his wild brood hallooing up the land
With all the furies following in their track,
The peaks, defiant, hurled Jove's thunders back
And met his bolts unmoved.

There lay the lake,
Green-cradled between banks of fern and brake,
Crooned to by mother-birds the whole glad day.
Still as an unawakened soul it lay,
As slept Endymion beneath the moon
When Dian's matchless kiss bequeathed the boon
Of dreams immortal and immortal youth
Freed evermore from touch of Time and Truth.
Deep were its waters, and as crystal clear
As on child's cheek the yet unsalted tear;

So satin smooth the radiance of its face,
The shadows, glancing, seemed to hang in
space;
And blue it was as blue of twilight sky
'Twixt birdsong time and startime, when on
high
Throbs Hesperus, a sparkle of wet gold—
Eve's single gem, caught edgewise in a fold
Of her loose robe—and in the moment's hush
The round, full, silver flute note of the thrush
Breaks jubilant upon the breathless air,
Calling the world to ecstasy of prayer.

Nor lore nor legend yet the hollow had,
Its haunts unknown to nymph or oread.
No faun with pointed ears peeped through the
trees:
Among the reeds no Pan piped melodies.
Fed by the cool inrush of mountain streams,
The lake lay given over to its dreams,
Dimpling with pleasure when light summer rains
Danced o'er its silvery surface, scarce at pains
To furrow its smooth brow when harsh winds
blew
And high o'erhead the screaming storm-gulls
flew.
Serene it mirrored all it knew of heaven—
The sun by day, the moon and stars at even;
Or if no light was, drew the darkness down
And wore it like a cloak of eider-down,

Nested as nest the birds, head under wing,
Happy and sure, dreading not anything.

Hither, one day, Narcissus came, chance-led,
Tracing a truant streamlet to its bed.
Deep ran the indented channel, boulder-strewn,
Athwart a tangled forest maze unhewn
Since time began. Adown it dashed the brook:
Now leaped the rocks and high above outshook
A cloud of snow-white plumes: now smoothed
itself
To limpid glass beneath a granite shelf:
Now slipped impetuous twin banks atween,
A tossing ribbon, spun of froth and sheen
In all the tints that Here's messenger
Flaunts in her arching veil of gossamer—
Here dappled green where gracious willows grew:
Here, where the sky laughed down, a lucent blue:
And here, where sunny leaf-flecked shallows
spread,
Amber and blended browns, with glints of red
From Earth's bared veins. And as it flowed, it
sang.
The forest with the rippling music rang.
Never Pactolus o'er his sands of gold
More merrily his yellow waves unrolled,
Nor sweeter sang Alpheus, when at last,
O'erta'en and conquered, Arethusa cast
Her lot with his. So, singing, through the wood
The streamlet ran, proclaiming life is good.

Thus lured from step to step, charmed ears and
eyes

Full fed with beauty, on his high emprise
Narcissus came. As toward the eternal light,
Divined in darkness and primeval night,
The blind grub crawls, dreaming of unknown
wings—

As toward the restless sea the river springs,
Albeit, born mid solitary snows,
Nothing it kens save silence and repose—
So, led by a dim instinct in his blood
That hungered for the beautiful and good,
Narcissus, groping through the actual, sought
A vaguely limned ideal—at best caught
No more than fleeting glimpse of his desire
Flashed back upon him like the phantom fire
Of a spent meteor upon the night,
That, flashing, dies and leaves a trail of light
As if a god had passed. An alien
He moved among his mocking fellow-men,
An exile in a human wilderness,
Lonely with the enduring loneliness
Of the separate moon, unaccompanied in heaven
Save for the clouds that cross her path, wind-
driven:
The dark, sad moon, though girt around with light:
The old, cold moon, who to her own despite
May never, be it to her nearest lover,
That hidden frozen heart of hers discover.

So came Narcissus to the lonely lake
Among the isolating hills, awake
Or dreaming scarce he knew, so rare the spot
He stumbled on. The day was hushed and hot;
But cool and odorous the dusky place
Received him in its balmy-armed embrace,
Wooing to rest ere yet the need was. Down
He cast him on the emerald sod, where brown
And golden-lined the falling shadows lingered,
Loath to be gone. Caressing zephyrs fingered
His shining curls. Not softer was the kiss
Wherewith Amor woke Psyche back to bliss;
Nor whiter was the crest of Leda's swan
Than the young brow the tresses drooped upon;
Nor straighter-limbed was any cedar's span,
Nor fairer any form Olympian
Than his that lay supine upon the moss.
Blue were his eyes as caverned lakes, across
Whose vivid depths hope played like leaping
flame,
And longing like a shadow went and came.
Now soft they closed, as flowers close at night;
As feathers fall, so fell his eyelids white.
And slow a sigh of peace stole 'twixt his lips,
A half-breathed note, as when a swallow dips
In swerving flight, and stirs the passive air
To silken sound.

Thus lay Narcissus there,
A fresh-culled lily dropped amid the green,
Fairer than any plucked by Proserpine

What time Dis found her, bosomed mid the flowers,
And gathered her to grace death's dreary bowers.
A stern old river god had fathered him;
A nymph his mother, peerless face and limb;
Half mortal, half immortal thus was born,
As, sooth, all sons of men, albeit shorn
In better part of their divinity
Through blind acceptance of a less degree,
Content to reach no higher than man's nature,
Who, an they would, might all be gods in stature.

Awhile Narcissus dreamed beneath the trees,
O'er mastered by a pleasantness of ease
That drugged his senses like an opiate;
Then woke to quickened consciousness, elate
When from a topmost bough a wee bold bird
Trilled to its nest, or when his fine ear heard
The whispered rustle of a bee-swung leaf,
Or whir of fragile wings, where in relief
Against the light some gauzy thing took shape.
Pleasant it was to mark the gnat escape
The net it floundered on; to watch the moth
Breathe open and breathe shut ere trembling
forth
To flirt its painted pinions in the sun;
Pleasant to see the little seedlings run
Like live things all along the tufted grass;
Pleasant to see the invisible breezes pass;
To see the thistledown, steered soft aside

From wrecking thorn and bramble undescried,
Sail on in billowy lightness o'er the swell
Of aerial seas. Pleasant the pungent smell
Of bruised balsams and of rain-wet roots,
The aroma of young leaves and spicy shoots;
Pleasant each subtlest scent and sight and sound
Within the whole wide wood's idyllic round.
And in the appealing beauty of the spot
Narcissus his life-loneliness forgot,
Alone no longer in a solitude
Graced with such gifts in royal plenitude.
For kind as knight to damsel in distress
Is Nature, to who seeks her large caress.

But now the lustrous day waned toward its close.
And slowly, like thin mountain mists, uprose
The laid-by ghosts of thought, again to vex
Narcissus' soul with problems, and perplex
With haunting wonders. Wherefore was it given
To mortal to conceive himself a Heaven,
Yet win no nearer to his goal? Oh, sweet
Beyond all earthly sweetness, and complete
Beyond all earth's perfections, his ideal!
The beautiful to be the only real,
The good the only truth, truth life's one aim.
Who could the splendour of such hope defame,
Brooking a lesser glory—be content
With any excellence less excellent
Than the supremely best? Yet though one search
The world o 'er, doth some blemish not besmirch

The whitest soul, mar the divinest face?
Who dare show all his heart, nor court disgrace?
Doth any lift at noon, unstained, untorn,
The spotless standard he upraised at morn?
Doth any bring from battle blade as bright
As that he erst unsheathe'd for the fight?
Who steers his puny skiff through wind and
storm

Unharmed to port? Alas! The high gods form
In ranks above, and watch with cruel laughter
Each bark set sail, knowing what shall be after—
A broken helm, dragged anchor, drifting oar.
Who pilots soul so shipwrecked to the shore?
The struggle over, death's black current sweeps
Each down where Hecate in loathing steeps
From flowerless weeds the odious rank wine
That slakes forever thirst for the divine.
And there in Lethe's level-flowing stream,
Lost is the last faint glimmer of his dream.

Thus ran Narcissus' thought in darkening lines,
As shadows lengthen when the day divines
Approaching night. And as the moonlight fails
When shredded clouds, like shallop with blown
sails,
Drift darkling o'er the silver of its track,
So loneliness upon his heart crept back
In broken gusts of feeling, till at last
The whole sky of his soul was overcast.
No Pylades he reckoned mid his friends

To match him pulse by pulse. Affection ends
Where fear begins, and he who climbs too high
Must climb alone. O'er-earnest was his eye,
O'er-grave his smile, o'er-weighed with thought
his speech.

No comrade of them all aspired to reach
His soul's far height, nor willed to understand
The import of his spirit's stern demand.

"Youth," said they, "is the heyday time of
flowers.

Leave age the gathering of simples. Hours
Compact of bloom and light and melody,
Pertain to Pan and to Terpsichore.

When Pan's pipe shivers, when the dead leaf
falls,

When from the naked bough the gaunt crow
calls,

When fitful gales scream down the withered
hills,

And from the mountain blows the blast that
kills,

When Nature is grown hollow-cheeked and
haggard,

With faded smile and heart-beats faint and
laggard,

Then may we meditate with likelier reason
Themes that in glowing June are out of season.
Now," said they, "is our June-time. Fare thee
well.

We leave thee for warm banks of asphodel.

Thou, with thy Circe face and Pallas tongue,
Dream on as liketh thee."

So mocking flung
Each one his word, and singing turned aside.
(He had not lonelier been an he had died.)

" 'T is spring time, 't is wing time,
The whole world 's in motion;
'T is sing time, 't is swing time
From ocean to ocean!

The grasses salaam; the reeds titter and nod;
Every zephyr that blows is the breath of a god.
Every leaf is a-curtseying, each to its neighbours,

The moss-banks are waving their delicate sabres.
The luminous ether drops bird-notes like dew
From the glimmering, shimmering, palpitant
blue.

The clouds are white eagles that fly toward the
sun.

The brooklets are ground-larks that sing as they
run.

Oh, 't is May time, 't is play time!
The whole world 's a riot—
A joyous disquiet

Of sunbeams that flicker, of water that heaves.
Pan, Pan from the rushes is piping: 'Come
hither!'

The swallow swoops downward: 'Oh, whither?
oh, whither?'

And 'Thither!' the faun from the forest cries:
'Thither!'

And Dryope laughs through her leaves.

Oh, 't is dove time, 't is love time!

The whole world is mating.

E'en Dis on his throne in the dark under zone
Is a-weary with waiting,
A-weary with comfortless flowerless night,
And has snatched him a bride from soft regions of
light.

E'en Dian o'er Latmos leans low from the cloud,
In the white of her magic love's dreams to
enshroud.

E'en the wind-footed maid falters thrice as she
flies,

To lift the gold apple shall make her love's prize.
E'en Daphne, a-quiver through all her young
boughs,

Sighs faintly: 'Alas for the unfulfilled vows!

Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!'

Creation's ablaze with the one flaming fire:

Athril with one passion, one burning desire.

Love calls from the hilltop, Love calls from the
hollow,

'T is spring time, 't is wing time,

'T is dove time, 't is love time,

Oh, follow! Oh, follow! Oh, follow!'''

Amid the careless crowd were some forsooth
Knew no disfavour toward the beauteous youth.

Full many a nymph had wooed him, though for naught;
And Echo, loveliest of them all, distraught
For love of him, as true as Clytie,
As fleet of foot as Lelaps, sure as he,
And more untiring than Alectryon,
Wherever led Liriope's lone son
Followed upon his footsteps undeterred,
Though never backward glance he gave, nor word.

Weeping and smiting her bare breast she went,
On him who pressed before her gaze attent.
Her eyes, tear-brimmed as anguished Niobe's,
Were midnight stars, mirrored on midnight seas.
So slight her form she scarce a shadow cast;
It seemed a ray of light shone where she passed.
Her footfall left the dew upon the blade,
Left whole the cobweb's labyrinthine braid,
Met neither prick of stone nor thrust of thorn.
Soft as the silken tassel of the corn,
And yellow as the glittering Golden Fleece,
Her bright hair, falling, veiled her to the knees.
Medusa's locks burned not with richer flame
Ere Pallas smote their glory into shame.

Certes no lovelier nymph in earth's demesne,
Nor sweeter, sued for love. Yet never quean
Less guerdon won for unsought heart's full dole,
Nor paid in costlier coin Love's unjust toll.
Silent she went as image carved in stone,

Voiceless since one dread day not far agone
When Here, the implacable in hate,
Avenging some poor slight shown her estate,
Took from the maid birthright of speech at will,
Decreeing she her smitten years fulfil
Dumb as the dead, save if one spake. Then
must

She, stooping, lift his last word from the dust,
Whate'er it be, and call it o'er and o'er
Till her breath fail her, and she can no more.

Cruel, O goddess, thine adjudged award
For that sweet tale that held thee from thy guard
With soft-tongued nothings all of half a day,
The while thy lord pursued his unwatched way!

Thus, on an eve whereof this seemed the fellow—
So soft its shades, its dripping lights so mellow—
Narcissus, unaware of her who followed,
Once roamed the woods. A rushing torrent
hollowed

Here a ravine, along whose rock-strewn crest
Idly he wandered, every sense at rest
In a charmed peace of chosen solitude
That left no room for cognizance of mood,
Nor unfulfilled desire of anything.
Sudden a homing bird on scarlet wing
Splashed through the green and swooped upon
his sight.
Impelled, he bent his gaze to note its flight;

So heard a breath, so saw an aspen stir,
So caught a gleam from golden hair of her
Who, still leaf-hidden, breathless where she
stood—

A slim wild thing within a wilder wood—
Waited for sign from him as from a god.

Swift anger took him, and he stamped the sod
Like one entrapped. The solitude despoiled,
Comradeship unelect thrust on him, foiled
The hour's magic. Irked by his vexation,
He strode on, glooming. She, in strange elation
That stayed her trembling limbs up like a
crutch,

Stept unseen after, till, teased overmuch
By conscience of some creature lurking there
With eyes that drank his movements as a hare
Drinks sound, he swept about, all measure lost,
His beauteous head thrown high, his curls back
tost.

“Speak! Who is here?” quoth he.

Forth from the wood
She crept, obedient, and drooping stood.
“Here,” breathed she back. And then again:
“Here. Here.”

And once again, faint as a falling tear,
“Here.” Dazed, abashed, with suppliant eyes
aglow,

Stood so before him, white as driven snow,
Her gold hair all about her like a cloud,

Her tender hands outstretched, her bright head
bowed.

So Semele, before the blasting splendour
Of fire-crowned Zeus, did her weak soul surrender.

But wrath held the young heart of him in bond.
Too angered to show pity or be fond,
Rudely he flung at her: "Why followest me?
Whom seekest thou, I pray thee?"

"Thee!" cried she,
And faltered to her knees, wet eyes adoring,
Wan arms upraised, the whole bent form implor-
ing.

"Thee! Thee!" And once again, as soft, as low
As dropping flake upon new fallen snow,
"Thee!"

Yet more rough his speech. "By all
above me,
No bolder couldst thou be an didst thou love
me!"

She quivered like a leaf on shaken tree.
Across her brow a flame rushed scorchingly.
"Love me," she whispered, helpless. "Love
me—me."

As from beyond a separating sea
The murmur floated to his heedless ear,
A prayer fit only for kind Heaven to hear

Narcissus

For depth of pain and passion it confess,
Her whole soul-life within the word comprest.
His look was as a knife-thrust in her heart.
Scornful he laughed: "Nay, prithee, stay
apart!"

I love not thee nor any. So farewell,"
And broke aside and plunged within the dell
Whose depths received and hid him from her
sight.

Her body could no more her will requite.
Her feet refused to follow. Her dimmed eyes
Denied their service. Forest, rocks, and skies
Fell into chaos. Like a broken flower,
Too rudely blown on in a stormy hour,
She drooped upon herself, vanquished, undone.

As drowns the moon in glory of the sun,
As melts the outblown foam upon the seas,
As fades the drifting perfume on the breeze,
As pales the bow on heaven's stupendous blue,
So her great love her fainting spirit slew.
"Farewell. Farewell," once and again she
sighed:
Then prone upon the sward sank down and
died,
And where she was, was nothing, save a mist
Exhaling on the ether. All earth list
With a quick inward-taken breath. "Farewell,"
Like the last quiver of a ceasing bell

Came floating downward, and her soul passed
on—
A sob among the hills—and so was gone.

As traversed roads seen through an autumn haze
Shut on returning vision, so those days,
Misted by memory, now dimly caught
And loosely held Narcissus' roving thought.
Love him beseemed some lustre yet to come—
Some greatness should strike lesser honours
dumb—

A splendour beyond passion, beyond sense,
Surpassing all conceived magnificence.
Wherefore, to dally with or love or faith
Of slighter worth, were but to love Love's
wraith.

Thus mused he, his swift fancy soaring higher
And higher as on lark-wings of desire,
Till in the infinite, as in the blue
The mounting bird dissolves upon the view,
His spirit lost itself.

Scarce sentient lay
His body thus, till by the close of day
Thirst whispered him. Awaked to fleshly needs,
He gazed around, half lifted from the weeds.
A holy hush suffused the temperate air;
Peace, like a written word, lay everywhere.
The birds were still. No tiniest breeze was
playing.

The leaves hung lax, like hands down dropped
from praying.

Pale gold the sky: pale gold the lake: pale gold
The light wherein the woods were cloaked and
stoled

As had the hour invested all creation

For one supernal act of adoration.

And the vast silence was as music. Thrilled
With harmonies empyrean, it filled

All space with soundless song. No living speech
To so impassioned utterance could reach.

And now for very bliss Day swooned to death,
Pouring his heart out in a blood-stained
breath,

And Heaven stooped to gather in his soul.

With awe Narcissus watched from pole to pole
The burning splendour spread, until again
Thirst called to him, insistent, like a pain.

"E'en so," thought he, "my thirst for the
ideal

Is yet to find assuagement in the real.

Some victor hour high Heaven shall give reply:
My soul must come into its own, or die."

Recumbent still, along the pliant grass,
To where the lake lay like a thing of glass,
His supple limbs he drew with lissome grace,
Till o'er the brink he bent his perfect face,
"To all the gods I drink," devoutly said,

And to the gleaming surface stooped his head.

Lo! as he bent above the golden sheen,
A face, young, exquisite, rose up between
His thirsting lips and the clear depths below.
As sudden sun on field of frosted snow,
So dazzling on his sight the vision broke,
And in his breast tumult of joyance woke.
Aside he crept, bewildered at such blaze
Of beauty, and afeared lest 'neath his gaze
It flee affrighted, as once Eros fled
When glance too curious was hazarded
On his fair godhood. Vain the trembling pause!
Back the lake drew him as a magnet draws.
And lo! again the face, its radiant eyes
Fixt on him in a wonder of surprise
And questioning. Not fairer e'en was he
By jealous Zephyr slain, nor fairer she
Born whitely of sea-foam on billowing crest.
Oh, beauty past belief—Creation's best—
Faultless of form, instinct with faultless soul—
Perfect in one incomparable whole!
All his own lofty longings looked at him
From those deep eyes. All his ideals dim
And vague and exquisite, here realised,
Informed with lovely life he recognised.
Scarce drew he breath for rush of ecstasy.
Each high and godlike possibility,
Enfolded in the soul as is the flower
Within the bud, in that revealing hour

Divinely dawning on him and held him mute,
As waits the unsung song within the lute
The liberating hand.

A moment yet

He dallied with enchantment. Then, beset
By marvel, breathed, "Who art thou?" half in
awe,
And as he spoke, his question spoken saw.
"Thine other self," he whispered down, and
thought

The same soft syllables he answering caught.
Nearer he pressed. The vision came more near,
Ardent as he, as he, too, in sweet fear—
Gave back his look of high companionship,
His joy ineffable, from eye and lip,
Gave back his eager smile, his timorous grace,
Gave love for love in that brief instant's space,
Till he, thereat emboldened overmuch,
With cry triumphant closer stooped to touch
The lips so near his own; almost he felt
Their breath ambrosial in his own breath melt
As fragrance of two roses blends in one:
When ah! e'en as they met, the face was gone.

Confounded he leaped up. What swift disguise
Had some god lent to thwart him of his prize?
His searching glance swept lake and sky in wrath,
If haply trace were of the followed path.
"Fear naught, O Love!" he called. "Return!
Haste hither!"

He listened, tense. Reply came from no whither.
The widening rings across the water's breast
In burnished grooves ran toward the shining west.
Pale gold the world, and Silence its high-priest.

Breathless he waited, his desire increased
Sevenfold by loss. But sudden, like a flame
Cut off, the daylight went, and darkness came
With velvet tread adown the hill's long slope.
And as a frost-touched flower fades, his hope
Shrivelled and fell. Then woke a little breeze
Within the wood, and stole from out the trees,
And touched as with a small forbidding palm
His wet, cold cheek. There seized him an alarm
Futile and formless as a mist. Dismayed,
Incontinent he drew back to the shade
Of the friendly oaks as to a warm green tent,
So generously the courteous branches lent
Their shelter. There at last, soothed, comforted
By their benignant presence, his fair head
Pillowed upon their cushioned roots, he slept,
And in his dreams tryst with the vision kept.

Near and more near now came soft-stepping
night
O'er neighbouring hills of dusky malachite,
As dying day undid the eastern bars.
Her flying tresses braided with gold stars,
The rustle of her garment, loosely flowing,
Making a murmured music of her going,

Her languorous lids half closed, her slackened hand
Dropping down dreams, slow passed she o'er the land,
A perfume faint, miraculously sweet—
The breath of blossoms bruised beneath her feet—
Trailing like brume of incense after her;
And place and time became one wide deep blur.

Scarce had the Hours begun their matin flight
Across the skies, linked in prismatic light,
Scarce had the golden chariot emerged
From the vast trough where rose-clouds seethed and surged,
When, with the first bird-note that tuned the air
To tinkling sweetness, from his leafy lair
Narcissus came, hope born again with day.
A jewelled world before him glowing lay.
A carbuncle the bed where late he dreamed;
'Neath opal sky the lake an opal seemed;
The hills, translucent through soft moonstone mists,
Were glimmering sapphires and pale amethysts;
The forest boughs a mass of beryls swung;
A chrysoprase from every grass-sheath hung;
Onyx and sardonyx was Earth's bare crust,
And all the scintillant air was diamond dust.

Joy filled Narcissus' heart. Joy burst in song
From his glad lips. He threw himself along

The water's brim, half hidden in lush grass,
Conjuring Zeus to bring his dream to pass.
And straightway, from the east upon his right,
Came a young dove in iridescent flight—
Omen of good that Heaven assenting gave—
And he, exultant, o'er the placid wave
Leaned his bright head.

Ha! From the depths anew
It rose to meet him through the riven blue—
A star ascending! Sight so dear as this
Surpassed concept—lips pleading for his kiss,
Eyes mystic with unfathomable adoring,
Arms outstretched as his own were in imploring.
Surely such look Alcestis wore, re-given
From death to him whose love made all her
Heaven.

An instant of transported recognition,
And lo! again it was not. What fruition
Of hope was this? Between his groping hands
The soft cool waters slipped like silken bands;
The tall weeds washed against his arms and
clung;
The wet curls from his forehead dripping hung.
But vanished was the vision. Too elate
Had been his hope and too precipitate,
Snatching at bliss ere yet was due the wage.
Back fled he to his leafy hermitage,
Such grief upon him as was that which tore
Achilles when Patroclus was no more.
Not Phaeton from heaven more headlong fell,

Nor Icarus, to sorrow's deepest hell,
Than now Narcissus, till at last o'ercame
His passionate longing his defeat and shame,
And drove him to the water's edge once more.
There once again joy shook him to the core,
For there, as if, re-conquered by his grief,
Willing to grant him semblance of relief,
The dear face tarried for him, smiled on him
With joy commensurate, through eyes yet dim
With undried tears, more passionate, more
tender,
Grown its expression of divine surrender,
More exquisite its rapture of devotion.
Intoxicate with answering emotion,
Moveless as marble image, dumb with bliss,
Fear-taught to caution, lest again he miss
The joy he grasped at, long Narcissus knelt
Bowed o'er the lake, nor thirst nor hunger felt,
Nor weariness, nor any selfhood knew,
Lost in the vision's ravishment.

So flew

Time by, if told in moments or in days
He reckoned not. Immovably his gaze
Was stayed upon the changing face below,
So full of noble longings and the woe
Of unattained desires, that last as first
Fled from his touch as were he thing accurst,
Till, acquiescent grown through slow despair,
He strove no more, and prayed but one mad
prayer—

That day endure for aye. For light was life,
And darkness death—twilight a losing strife,
Where life and death did battle, and death
won.

Sleep had abandoned him. From sun to sun
One gnawing care, one ravenous need alone
Sucked at his life—the need to make his own
The beauty featured in that haunting face.
Alas! doth Heaven accord to any grace
To win to the ideal through desire
Unfructified? Like torch to funeral pyre
Is aspiration without effort. He
Who rounds his faulted soul to symmetry,
Needs more than barren worship of the good
To re-create him to the shape he would.
Too late Narcissus, swooning o'er the lake,
Saw mirrored there what life had held at stake;
Saw written clear, those lovely lines within,
All he was meant to be and might have been;
Too late saw all his soul had lost of gain;
Too late saw sin in failure to attain.

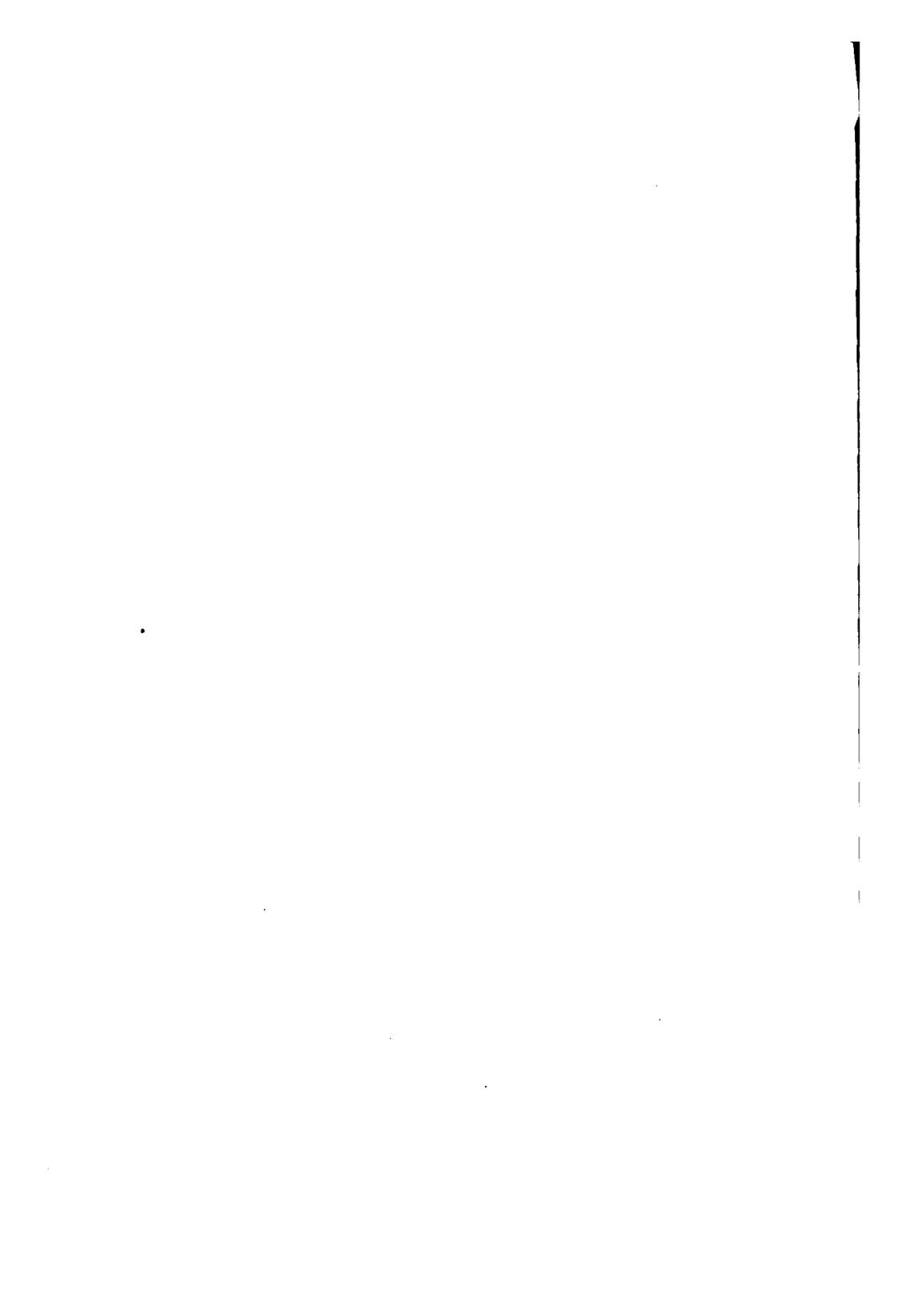
Thus, goaded by vain longing, fled his strength
As flies the wind-lashed sand, till spent at length,
With piteous glazed eyes that saw no more
Fixt where the wave the abiding vision bore,
Soulless, insensate, conscienceless he lay,
A thing by Earth and Heaven cast away.
And days passed, with their sunbeams and their
blooms,

And nights passed, with their stars and solemn
glooms,
And still the gods were silent.

So died he,
For love of that which he had failed to be—
A soul all unfulfilled and incomplete.
And where he died, a milk-white flower, sweet
With unuttered and unutterable things,
Fruitless through Nature's many harvestings,
And bearing at its heart a burning flame,
Grew, and was called thenceforward by his
name.

Vita

An Allegorical Drama



TO

FRANCESE LITCHFIELD TURNBULL

PERSONAGES

TIME, *Guardian of Truth*

VITA, *Daughter of Time*

TRUTH

HAPPINESS

FAITH

CARE

MALICE

HOPE, *a Sorceress*

HISTORY, *a Herald*

THREE COURTIERS

CHORUS OF THE DAYS

ACT I

(SCENE I—*Throne-room in the palace of TIME.*
Chorus—seven maidens hand in hand—surrounding the throne. TIME seated in state upon it.)

CHORUS:

O most mighty, most glorious,
Most high, most victorious,
Most ancient of birth!
O Monarch supremest!
O Power extremest
And gentlest of Earth!

Who are we to adore thee?
What are all things before thee
But drops in a river
That hastest to be tossed in thee,
Left in thee, lost in thee,
For ever and ever!

O Ruler of Ages,
Awarder of wages
To the cycles in round!
We grow faint in thy glory,

O Sovereign hoary,
Star-girdled, sun-crowned!

(*The music becomes softer and softer and the maidens disappear with the last line, their song still sounding faintly in the distance.*
Enter HISTORY.)

HISTORY: Hail, Master!

TIME: Thou art welcome, History.

Whence comest thou?

HISTORY: From every whither home.

TIME: What hast thou gleaned?

HISTORY: Both good and evil.

TIME: Much
I trow of evil, but yet more of good,
Else hast thou falsely garnered. Sift thine
hoard.

HISTORY: There have been mighty wars.

TIME: I will note down
Their chieftains. Be the rest forgot. Pass on.

HISTORY: One fell for whom a stricken world
makes moan.

TIME: I will replace him.

HISTORY: All the earth is red
And sick with blood.

TIME: I will remantle it
With peace and flowers.

HISTORY: There live who best were dead.

TIME: I will o'ertake them.

HISTORY: A new creed is born.

TIME: I will examine it.

HISTORY: A genius dies
Unrecognised.

TIME: I will embalm his name.

HISTORY: A villain walks in honour.

TIME: I will brand
His tomb.

HISTORY: Men toil.

TIME: I will bring rest to each.

HISTORY: Men weep.

TIME: I will bring all forgetfulness.
Hast more?

HISTORY: But this. One seeketh Truth of
thee.

TIME: Thinks he to look on Truth and live?

HISTORY: He dares.

TIME: Whence cometh he?

HISTORY: Man knows not whence nor when,
Nor more than that Earth names him Happiness.

TIME: I know him of repute, but not of form.
I have not looked on him since Earth was young,
And have grown old in watching for him. Go.

(*Exit HISTORY.*)

Ha, this imports in very deed! He comes—
He whom I could not summon at my will,
Nor bend to my control! He comes at last,
Albeit not in homage; seeking Truth,
Of me, her long-time guardian, makes his claim.
Fool! Fool! Have they who sought her of me
found?

Have they who begged her of me won their
prayer?

Not yet! Men cry out: Truth! Oh, give us
Truth!

And know not what they cry for. Did I yield,—
Did I at their insistence bring her forth
And set her in the midst of them, ablaze
With the bareness of her splendour,—why, how
then?

Not yet is Earth attempered unto Truth.
Men hold their cursed idols all too close
To their false hearts to meet her face to
face,

To take her by the hand, and say: Be mine!
What throne so high is, she might sit thereon,
Nor dim the crown of him she sat beside?
What fane so pure is, she might kneel within
Nor show their garments spotted who made
prayer?

What love so bright she would not tarnish it—
What art so rich she would not beggar it
With but a glance? Go to! The day 's not
ripe

For her revealing. Truth is dangerous
To hearts unaccoladed to her touch.
She shall not forth.

(Enter VITA.)

TIME:

Thou, Vita?

VITA:

Father, hail.

TIME: Fitly thy coming chimeth with desire.
Here 's joy for thee.

VITA: Ripe fruits hang not o'er long.
I plucked thy word in coming. Grateful was 't
To my life's thirst.

TIME: How came my word to thee?

VITA: Methinks my heart did hear before
mine ears.
They catch light sounds who hark for
Happiness.

TIME: Then listen close. For soft as step of
sun

On cushioned sward—noiseless as rush of star
Across night's azure—still as stir of leaf
Unfurling to the spring—so Happiness
Comes to this world of watchers, so goes by,
Unheard.

VITA: What boots it then I waste slow years
Mistaking mine own pulse-beats for his call?
Great Father, giver of gifts, my being crown!
Bid Happiness be mine!

TIME: This may I not.

VITA: How may'st thou not? What wonder-
working will
Can bar the consequence of thy command?
Are not all born thy slaves?

TIME: All save this one,
Who nor my vassal is, nor names me Lord.

VITA: Thou mock'st! Art not supreme?

TIME: There is no power

But hath its bound. Albeit my law obtains
From this pale globe to Heaven's remotest sun,
Here stays my rule. Here ends my sovereignty.

VITA: Thou nam'st thy greatness and thy
nothingness

In the one breath. What hath that power
of worth

Which doth possess all excellence save one
That is the essence and the sum of all?
Father, I will have Happiness! I will!
Give thou me Happiness! Give, give! oh give!

TIME: Leave off thine importunities. Weak
prayers,

Blown by vain winds against the impossible,
Make shipwreck and are lost.

VITA: But wherefore then
Comes Happiness so near, if not to me?
Better afar, than nigh and yet not mine!
More blest is he who ne'er knew Happiness,
Than he who buys the knowledge with the loss.

TIME: Not so, while memory thereof endures,
Gilding life's desert with its afterglow.

VITA: To live in light of a remembered joy
Is through enduring dusks to mourn the sun.
Whose eyes shall drink their fill of Happiness
While mine go starved?

TIME: The clear, wide eyes of Truth.

VITA: Truth! Truth! I love her not!

TIME: Bestir thee then
To win thee Happiness. Behold, are not

The days of all thy life within thy hands
To mould them as thou wilt for good or ill?
Thyself, and naught outside thee, is thy fate.
That thou becomest shapes thy destiny.
Be strong. Be just, unconquerable, true.
Make Happiness thine own.

VITA: So fair a prize
What hand could choose but reach for, though
to miss?

Deem me not over-bold, but dutiful,
That wish out-leaps to action. Happiness
Shall yet be mine—Oh, joy!—shall be mine own—
Mine own! oh, joy—joy—joy!

TIME: Oh, blinded heart
And poor! Oh, falsest vision! Happiness
Comes not at call, depends not on desire,
Matches no dream, to no man's measure fits.
Not they who seek are they who find. Not
they

Who ask, receive. But they who neither look
Nor long for guerdon, they who largely live,
Freed from self's narrow shackles by a love
Broad as humanity, whose every thought
Is a white deed, for joy of serving done—
To these, unheralded, unrecognised
Save in that inmost shrine where burns his light,
To these comes Happiness, to these brings
Heaven.—

Thou foolish heart and vain! Pass on. Pass on.
(*Exeunt.*)

(SCENE II—VITA'S *apartments*. FAITH, CARE,
and MALICE winding wreaths.)

CARE: Our Mistress tarries.

FAITH: Nay, she cometh soon.

MALICE: I 'll leave off labour till she nighs.

What need

To prick my fingers in her absence?

CARE: Whence,
That thou may'st idle must we doubly toil?
How think'st thou, Faith?

FAITH: We shall have double joy
In her approval of the ended task.

Speed thee, good Care. She surely cometh
soon.

MALICE: Wherefore her haste, when she may
stay and stuff

Her hungry ears with news of Happiness?

CARE: O Heavens! I would I were a queen!

MALICE: Naught more?
Plait thee a galling crown of thy life's thorns,
And wear them regally in all men's sight
Upon thy brow, in lieu of next thy heart;
Thus shalt thou ape Earth's queens. To be
high-placed,

Is to become a puppet in a show,
Who but for men's diversion, moves, speaks,
weeps,

Wearing its feelings, like its tawdry gems,
Outside for coarse-grained multitudes' applause.

FAITH: Heed not when Malice mocks. To be
a queen
Is to make sorrow royal in degree,
And mirth most generous, since nations share it.
Why would'st thou be a queen?

CARE: That Happiness
Might reach e'en me. Methinks one only smile,
Dropped on my life like sunshine on a seed,
Would ripen flowers to blossom. But a maid
So lowly born as I—how should I dream
Of Happiness?

MALICE: Dream not. A pity 't is
When high-strung hearts be joined to low-tuned
lives.

It doth put Nature out of harmony.

FAITH: Nay, keep thy lofty longings. They
are stars
To steer by as we climb the road to Heaven.
I, too, have dreamed of Happiness,—such
dreams!—

So fair they made a very day of night.
Such dreams! Such dazzling, full, sufficient
dreams

I am content in the remembering them.

MALICE: 'T is a thin soul that feeds on shadows.

CARE: Hush!
Our Mistress!

(Enter VITA. *The maidens spring to offer her
flowers, and place garlands about her dress.*)

VITA: Haste! And ply your uttermost

Of skill. I would be fair this day. A glass!
FAITH (*kneeling before her and looking lovingly up at her*): I'll be thy glass to tell thee thou art fair.

MALICE (*to VITA*): Because she thinks as thou dost, being so true
A reflector of thyself! Thy mirror, sure,
Doth prove thee fairest with none other by.

CARE: Too pale, too wan thou art. And here's a tress
Shall soon show silver for its wonted gold.

VITA: Where? Where? Must I already flaunt
Time's flag?

FAITH: Dear Lady, I will lay the wreaths so close

Naught else may show.

VITA: Ay, wrap me up in bloom.
Hide my poor faults with fragrant overgrowths.
Touch every blemish with such tender art
It turn to beauty, making me more fair
For glory of misfortunes garlanded.

MALICE: Fittest were roses with their thorny sweets,
For such disguisement.

VITA: Bring my richest robe.
FAITH (*bringing mantle*): Ere dawns the morrow,
richer may this be
For joys it shall to-day inherit.

MALICE: Nay,
If garments keep the good of bygone hours,

Then rags be choicest vestment for a prince.

CARE (*examining manile*): Here soon shall be a
rent. Here lurks a stain.

MALICE: Where tears fell, likest.

FAITH: The more surely then
Are smiles ere long to follow. Whilst it storms,
May seers be boldest in predicting sun.

VITA: My jewel case!

CARE (*turning over the jewels*): Alas! Here
lacks a gem.

VITA (*fastening on necklace*): Doth this
become me?

MALICE: Troth, as dew the briar.

VITA (*fastening on different jewels*): And these?

CARE: Thou wilt o'erload thyself. Thy love
Will know not if he look on gems or thee.

VITA: That love which doth not see me in my
gems,

Distinguishing the fashion of my soul
Through all the outward trickery of dress
And mummery of custom, holding these
As part of me and not disguise of me,
That love were small worth having.

MALICE: Why, in truth,
If thou and these thy jewels make but one,
Now art thou well worth loving.

VITA: Prithee, peace,
Thou wasp-tongued Malice!

MALICE: Heed! Thy love may hear,
And hold thy speech to be such part of thee,

He choose not take thee with it. (*Going*) Ah,
vain fool,

Decking thy poor conceit with buds and gems!
May Happiness be lured with baits like these?

(*Exit.*)

CARE: I doubt there 's such a thing as
Happiness.

'T is but the name of some dear, hopeless hope
That men do bind their souls with when they
bleed,

To stay the bleeding, though it heal them not.
I 'll think no more on Happiness. The dream
Hath sure no mating with reality. (Exit.)

VITA: My heart turns chill with sudden doubt,
as when

A drifting cloud, eclipsing the sweet sun,
Drops its cold shadow o 'er a startled land.

O Faith, is verily the world so void?

Is there no Happiness this side of Heaven?

Does Death hold life's whole guerdon? Speak!

Oh, speak!

FAITH: Ah, Lady, have I knowledge more
than thou?

The world is vast, and all its vexing roads
Round out through darkness to an unseen goal,
While men grope here and there with helpless
hands,

Crying: Lo this—lo that—is Happiness!

And clutch at strangest phantoms. Yet some-
where—

I needs believe it, or the doubt would kill,—
Somewhere, e'en here, is a true Happiness
That true hearts find and live by. The good
God
Withholds not all His gifts from Earth for
Heaven.

VITA: O Faith, thou sweetest voice to dumbest
souls,
Thou lantern-light to stumbling feet,—abide,
Abide thou with me now and evermore!

(Enter CARE and MALICE.)

MALICE: Lo, Happiness approacheth!
VITA: Ah, then, go!
Leave me! Go all! I fain would be alone
To dream that dream ecstatic which precedes
The waking of attainment.

FAITH: Dream in peace. (Exit.)
CARE: Nay, rouse thee from thy trance!
Is Happiness
So lightly thine,—so swiftly, surely won?
VITA: Let the fear lie. Why fret the living hour
With dread of unborn moments?

MALICE: Blind, oh, blind!
To Truth, not thee, he comes. Since when
proved Truth
So mean a rival?

VITA: Truth is hidden deep.
Not his to find her.
MALICE: But who seeks for Truth.
Is lost to thee.

VITA: Yet sure he goes not far.

CARE: Thou hast deep drunken at Faith's
fount. Beware

Thy hope imperil not thy caution.

MALICE: Ay,

No prayer can stay him an he choose to go;
Yet if he go, no hope may follow him.

VITA: Ah, if he leave me, could my charmèd
feet

Refrain from following after in the trace
However faint and far of Happiness?

MALICE: There is no path so all-intolerable
As that we tread where Happiness hath been
And is not.

VITA: Prithee keep thy bitter thoughts
For thine own soul's digesting, and go hence!
Why augur loss of what not yet I have?
What though the dream prove vain? It is most
sweet;

And I will feast upon it while it lasts,
Nor brook starvation in its turn the worse!

I will not hearken more. Away! Go! Go!

CARE: I go. But not for long. (*Exit.*)

MALICE: I will be nigh. (*Exit.*)

VITA (*alone*): Now beauteous dream, return!
Now steep my soul

In Earth's divinest rapture—Happiness
Not fully come, but speeding on bright wings
Across the boundless desert of desire,
So swiftly there 's but space to say: I wait!

So surely there 's no doubt to mar; yet still
Too far to surfeit with possession; like
That royal hunger heralding a feast,
Which waxes poorer for the feeding o' it.
Ah, very heart of ecstasy—to know
Fulfilment nigh, yet still anticipate!

(Enter HAPPINESS.)

HAPPINESS: Not here!

VITA (*trembling*): O Heavens! Can this be
Happiness?

HAPPINESS: Am I so strange to look upon
that one

Should know me not? I pray thee, where is
Truth?

VITA: Nay, hold! How know'st thou Truth?

HAPPINESS: Through love of her.

VITA: How camest thou to love her?

HAPPINESS: Seeking her,
I loved her.

VITA: Thou wilt find her not.

HAPPINESS: I shall.

VITA: Then stay! Give o'er the quest!
For I am she.

HAPPINESS: Soil not thy sweet mouth with
so sad a lie.

Farewell.

VITA: Stay! Stay! How knowest thou I
lie?

HAPPINESS: Because thou art not Truth.

VITA: How canst thou know?

Nor thou nor any ever has seen Truth.
Am I not fair enough?

HAPPINESS: Too fair by far,
In outward ornament.

VITA (*flinging off jewels*): O Cruel! What!
Am I not sweet enough?

HAPPINESS: Too sweet by far.
With borrowed beauty.

VITA (*tearing off flowers*): O Inexorable!
Am I not rich enough?

HAPPINESS: Too rich by far
In all that is not thee.

VITA (*throwing off mantle*): Inhuman! Look!
Look on me now! Am I not bare enough,
And poor enough and plain enough for Truth?

HAPPINESS: Too plain, too poor, too bare.
Truth in herself
Lacks nothing. Thou in everything lack'st
Truth.

VITA: Truth! Truth! I hate her! And
she is not fair!

For I have seen her—seen she is not fair!

HAPPINESS: Thou hast seen Truth?

VITA: Oh, long—oh, long ago,
In days when still I knew there was a God,
And that the stars meant Peace and sometime
Heaven.

And then I saw her, and she then was fair,
But not so fair I long desired her;
And soon I did with loathing put her far,

And turn mine eyes from her and speak her not,
And hate her with worst hatred.

HAPPINESS: Oh, forsown
The eyes that having looked on Truth, see
aught,
Love aught besides save Truth for ever more!
Lo, I have seen her not; yet shrined within
Mine inmost soul her holy image lies,
Peerless, transcendent, perfect, holding me
From thought and breath, save thought and

Where bideth she?

VITA: I know not. Time long since
Concealed her, and I wearied not to seek,
Cared not to know. What matters it to me,
Who have one passion only in my breast,
A riotous love, beating through tortured veins—
A fierce mad flame—a lurid glutinous fire
Of devastating glory—a white heat
Of living death that robes me as for Heaven
In blinding light, to leave me at the last
A thing of ashes in a world-wide waste!

HAPPINESS: I pity thee. And so farewell again.

VITA: Nay, nay! oh, stay! oh, leave me
not—not now—

Dear Happiness! One little moment more
Let me but look on thee, let me but fill
Mine eyes so full of the rare sight of thee,
They hold thee in thine absence uneffaced!

HAPPINESS: Peace come to thee. And a
third time farewell.

VITA (*kneeling*): O God! O God! May I
entreat Thee not?

Must I see Happiness depart from me,
Nor fling such mighty prayers out on the way
He dare not pass them? Let me bind him down
With prayers, with linked petitions laid so close
He cannot leave me!

HAPPINESS: Peace, poor Vita, peace!
No prayer so perfect is, no faith so strong.
It can lay lasting hold on Happiness.
I go. Forbear thy weeping. Tears are wings
That speed my going. Fare thee well.

(*Exit.*)

VITA: Gone! Gone!
And all my heart cries out: For ever!—What?
Weep not?—I will pierce Heaven with my cries!
Will storm God's Throne with clamorous appeal,
Compelling mercy for my wretchedness!
O God, was it so much I asked of Thee
Thou could'st not grant it to a lifetime's suit?
Would it have beggared Thee of Happiness
Bestowing but this single boon I craved?
Hear! Hear! Or art Thou deaf, and Heaven
so far
All prayers fall short of Thee? Did'st Thou
concede
Me being, but that I might curse the gift?
Can Thy omnipotence do naught, save stamp

Self-consciousness of frailty on me? Nay,
Not so I learned to know Thee—oh, not so!
They told me God meant Mercy, Patience, Love,
And infinite Compassion,—not Despair!—
Not a divine Inexorability
Rebellious souls should beat and break against
In weak antagonism!—O God—O God—
Forgive the hatred of a broken heart!
Forgive the madness of a misery
That knows not what it speaks! Forgive!
Forgive!

(Enter MALICE, FAITH and CARE.)

MALICE: I heard thee from afar. What mean
thy cries?

FAITH (*raising up* VITA): Oh, my loved mis-
tress, what hath come to thee?

CARE (*picking up* jewels): Shattered and
bruised beyond repair!

VITA: Ay. Ay.
Like hearts that soared too high, and falling,
broke.

FAITH (*gathering up the flowers*): Nay, see,
these yet are sweet.

VITA: Like scattered hopes
That shall not bloom again through all the years;
Yet sweet—ay, perilous sweet unto the end.

FAITH (*lifting the mantle*): And this; thou
yet canst wear it.

VITA (*dashing it off*): Never more!
There leave it to be trodden underfoot!

Never again shall I stand decked in gems
And flowers, and plume me on my sumptuous-
ness!

The dream is broken, and the charm mis-
wrought.

Poor flowers (*lifting them*). So slight? so frail?
that yet me-seemed

Fit snares for Happiness! Poor futile gems!
(*Raising them*.)

So valueless? Oh, ineffectual wealth!
(*Spurning them with her foot*.)

How worthless, ah, how vain—how impotent
To win me Happiness!

FAITH: Nay then, dear Heart,
Is Happiness too far to follow?

VITA: Ay.
Faint hearts are leaden-soled. He is too far.

MALICE: Too far. Nor ever is too near to
miss.

FAITH: O Mistress, would'st thou seek? I
go with thee.

VITA: Ah me, but whither go—but whither
turn?

How follow footsteps that have left no trace?

MALICE: He sure goes free of heart that
treads so light!

FAITH: In quest of Truth he went.
Then seeking Truth,

Must we find Happiness.

CARE: The way is far.

FAITH: But Time shall lead us, and an end
must be.

VITA: Ay, let us go. Although the way be
long,

Were failure bitterer at life's blunted end
Than at its keen beginning? There our chance!
Better to risk content on the poor hope
Of winning more, than stay ourselves on less.
Go. Go. Make ready. Long the journey
looms.

ACT II

(SCENE I—*A forest. Night. HAPPINESS alone.*)

HAPPINESS: O Truth, where art thou? In
the whole wide heaven

Is there no polar star that points to thee
Immovably, through all of lapsing time?—
No magnet in the whole vast universe
To draw to thee through trackless distances?
O Truth, hast thou no voice to call to me
Athwart the dark, that I come where thou art?
No clue to aid me—no firm woven thread
To guide me through life's starless labyrinth?
Truth, answer! Art thou living whom I seek?
Or art thou but a name—a phantom thing
To lure men to destruction with false show?
Nay! Nay! Thou livest! Every star that sends
Its conquering ray across night's black abyss—
Each sea that, torn with infinite desire,
Stretches its seeking arms out toward the shore—
Each storm that sweeps, magnificent and bold,
With fringe of lightning, scimitar of rain
And crown of massive darkness, like a king
Across the humbled land—each summer eve
That pours its stillness and its angel calm

Upon the restless pulses of the day—
Each is thy witness, each thine evidence,
Speaking in utterance distinct and clear
To the blest soul that loves thee, blest enough
In that it love thee, though it find thee not.
But I will win! No height so dizzy is,
No precipice so sheer, gulf so profound,
Gloom so intense that it shall fright me back!
With love to light me, reason for a staff
And God for Guide, how fail of Truth's award?
Courage, faint heart! Wing thy slow feet with
prayer,
Lift thy bowed head, and onward to the goal!

(*Exit.*)

(*Enter TIME, VITA, and COURT.*)

HISTORY: It hath been said of him he passed
by here.

CARE: Oh, sorry guide, who present hope
would hale

From so dead past! Hath ever it been told
That Happiness returned the way he went?

VITA: Methought I saw him but a moment
since.

TIME: Thou should'st have held the moment.
Fled, may Time

With utmost swiftness no more reach thereto.

FAITH: Then let it pass. Another comes as
sweet.

1ST COURTIER: Whither went Happiness?

2D COURTIER: This way!

3D COURTIER: No, this!

2D COURTIER: Sure, here are tracks of him.

3D COURTIER: Sure, here he stayed.

1ST COURTIER: Surest of all, here is he not!

TIME: Pass. Pass.

COURTIERS: Which way?

TIME: Forward. I turn not back.

VITA: Ah me,

Could'st thou but conjure from the dead that
hour

When I beheld him, though he was not mine,
Should I lack more?

FAITH: Dear Mistress, take thou heart!
Thou yet shall see him, though the night be
drear,

And the way long that bring thee.

MALICE: Long! Long!

TIME: Pass.

1ST COURTIER: Hold, hold! methinks—

2D COURTIER: I would make sure—

3D COURTIER: One glance—

TIME: Pass.

(*Exit COURTiers slowly.*)

HISTORY: Stay! The day is not yet written—

TIME: Pass.

(*Exit TIME and HISTORY, the chorus,
too, moving off as it sings.*)

CHORUS:

So they pass, so they pass
The sweet moments, alas!

Tiny seeds of Eternity
Summoned to birth;
From the fields of Infinity
Falling to earth.
So they pass, so they pass,
Like a breath on the glass,
Like a thought in a dream,
Like a meteor's gleam,
Holding all mortal time
As a word holds a rhyme,
As a heart holds desire.
Yet though nothing is done in them,
Nothing is won in them,
Nothing begun in them
Ere they expire,
Will they bide with us longer
For prayers that wax stronger?
Nor darkness crawl after
Through tears, or through laughter?
Nay, death will delay not.
The moments will stay not.
Amort and adrift
As blown leaves in a lane,
Evanescing and swift
As the lightning through rain,
So they pass, so they pass,
While men cry out, alas!

(Exit CHORUS.)

VITA: Oh, woe! Oh, woe! What treasured
joys are theirs

Who thus bewail life's passing? Time is long,
And Grief is slow, and Death is tardy-paced
To him whose years hang on his neck like beads
That he needs tell off one by one in turn,
With prayers and moans and scourgings unto
blood,

Ere he may break his fast.

MALICE: With bitter herbs!

CARE: Longest is life to him who counts the
time

Betwixt his labour and the recompense;
To him who pays the bread of yesterday
With this day's toil; to him whose bursting
brain

Travails in sleep, and works across its dreams,
And knows no Seventh Day from year to year.
The weeping doth forget his grief in sleep.
The hungry dreams, and sitteth at a feast.
For sick men there grow drugs to dull the pain.
But for the anxious man, the man of cares,
Nature provides no anodyne.

MALICE: Save death.

VITA: All lives are long. The babe that lives
an hour,

Hath too much time to weep in.

MALICE: Not enough
To learn to smile in.

FAITH: Nay, the soul that sees
The far, pure end of its creation—fair
To longing sight as flower on lifted stalk

Grown high above the marsh-land whence it
sprang—

That soul delights in life, and finds time scant
For full achievement of allotted powers.

VITA: They must be either young or far in
years

Who joy in life; the young because they still
See Earth athwart the light they brought from
Heaven;

The old, because at closing of their day
Death lends his sunset glow to life's grey dome,
As last relief to long monotony.

But he who is not young, and ah, not old,
Who living through youth's exquisite deceits
Has reached the Desert of Reality,
And feels its arid winds upon him, sees
Its white hot dust, its cruel nudity,
Yet knows no outcome save the path that leads
Across its dreariness to far-off Death—
Shall such an one love Life?

FAITH: 'T is piteous
How men forget a thousand present joys
Remembering a single pain that pricked,
And overlook a myriad flowers in bloom
For grief of one bruised bud! Be not thou so.
Nor think thyself elected from thy mates
To royal wretchedness. For Sorrow keeps
No separating throne where one may sit,
Crowned with distinction of surpassing pain,
To rule his kind by might of suffering.

In sorrow all are equal, though men flaunt
Their martyrdom before the world, or wear
Their sackcloth hidden under festal robes.
Then, prithee, smile as thou wert wont to smile!
Doth Nature not go through her round the
same

From year to year, and find as many flowers
To deck this Spring with as she found the last?
Yet she hath wept between times. So thou, too,
Sweet Lady, cast thy dead woe off. Be glad.

VITA: Can one be happy, without Happiness?

FAITH: Ay. Thou hast looked on Happiness.
Enough.

Thou hast henceforth the memory thereof.

MALICE: Why, if thy heart be set on Happiness,

Pursue thou not the search? I know of one
Who sure will aid thee, though all others fail.

VITA: Thou dost? And whom?

MALICE: That ancient Sorceress,
Who with her magic and her muttered charms
Holds half the known world spellbound.

VITA: Who is she
Thus potent?

MALICE: Hope.

VITA: Bring me to her straightway.

FAITH: O Lady, pause! I know her. She is
old

And potent truly, but may play thee false.
Not all who seek of Hope win Happiness!

CARE: I know Hope not. The very name is strange.

MALICE: And hadst thou sooner known her, thou wert now

Less age-worn. She hath wondrous mysteries That, rightly used, do keep one young for aye.

VITA: Where lives she?

FAITH: O sweet Mistress, trust her not!

VITA: Why now, what frights thee? She who conquers Time

Must be a right rare witch! Bring me to her.

MALICE: Lady, this way.

(*Exeunt VITA and MALICE.*)

FAITH (going): Alas! Hope's very name Hath wrought its spell! Needs must I follow her.

(*Exit.*)

(SCENE II—*A heart-shaped cave.* HOPE bending over a caldron.)

HOPE (sings):

Stir! Stir! The fire's ablaze!
Throw in Fancy's pungent sprays!
Sweet deceits and drugs that daze!
One part guile, and three parts craze—
Hope mixes well—well—well!

Stir! Stir! Skim off a tear!
Pluck away a scorching fear!
Strain a memory out here!
Lay a spicy maybe near!
It seasons well—well—well!

Stir! Stir! The caldron steams!
 Pour in visions! Drop in dreams!
 Fling in ecstasies, and gleams
 Of a joy that madness seems!
 It worketh well—well—well!

Stir! Stir! There 's time to spare!
 Here a wish and there a prayer
 Make a charm that well shall wear!
 Though long weeping wash it bare,
 It holdeth well—well—well!

(Enter VITA and MALICE.)

MALICE: Yonder is Hope, the Sorceress.

VITA: That, Hope?

So old is she?

MALICE: Ay, old as birth of man.

VITA: She hath strange eyes.

MALICE: They look out into mist.

VITA: She hath a marvellous expression. See.
 Is 't Joy, or Dread, or Pain, or Wonderment,
 Or uttermost Desire?

MALICE: All. It is Hope.

VITA: Will she be wroth if I bespeak her?

MALICE: Nay,

None hears more willingly. Call thou on her,
 And I will wait without. (Exit.)

VITA: Hope! Hope!

HOPE: I hear.

Hope never sleeps.

VITA: I need thee, Hope.

HOPE: Ay. Ay.
All need me.

VITA: But my need transcendeth all.
My frustrate life is done—abortive—dead.
Its stark days hang along Time's shrivelled stalk,
Blasted and unfulfilled, like frozen buds;
And I, while still I make my moan, am not.

HOPE: I will breathe life into thy life.

VITA: O Hope,
What were such gift but keener pain? Give
more,
Or less.

HOPE: I will fill up thy heart with fire
That Death alone shall quench.

VITA: Nay, more, O Hope!
Would'st thou consume me with an inward flame,
Nor give it aught to feed on?

HOPE: It shall feed
Upon itself, yet thus consuming, grow.

VITA: What dost thou grant me but an appetite
Beyond this earth's appeasing? Give me more,
Else shall I die of longing's ecstasy,
And slow despair of gain.

HOPE: What is despair?
Longing I know, but know not of despair.

VITA: Teach me, too, to unlearn it!

HOPE: Where is Hope,
Is room for no despair. Dost thou want more?

VITA: This—this—but this! Oh, give me
Happiness!

HOPE: The sum of all wants—Happiness.

Ay. Ay.

Life's last best secret. Earth's impossible.

The finite's infinite! Poor fool. Poor fool.

VITA: Canst help me not?

HOPE: Yea, I can blind thine eyes
So thou shalt think thou graspest all of Heaven
With but the upward stretching of a hand.
Yea, I can bind such sandals to thy feet
That thou shalt walk o'er sword-blades rood on
rood

To pluck a nettle, nor shalt feel the pain.

Yea, I can teach such bluntness to thine ears
That thou shalt hear no sound 'neath God's
great sun,

Save the mad beatings of thy maddest heart!

VITA: Kind Heaven, protect me from such
gifts, O Hope!

Hast thou but these?

HOPE: Nay, others. I have balm
To pluck the sting from heart-stabs. Drugs I
have

Whereby grief sleeps, and weakness is made
strength,

And fear engenders courage. I have charms
To lure the dying back to life, to keep
Hearts young for ever, glorify the dark,
And wreath the dead lips with smiles.

VITA: Canst do so much
Thou surely hast some magic yet unspent

That shall restore me Happiness again.

HOPE: What is thy Happiness? Age names it Youth.

Youth names it Folly; Folly, Ignorance, And Ignorance, Supremacy. Poor soul!

But peace! Thou shalt find Happiness again.

VITA: Dost promise it? O Hope, I live anew! And then?

HOPE: Peace, peace! What is thy Happiness?

VITA: A winged immortal.

HOPE: Take with thee this weed (*giving it*) Wherewith if thou anoint his eyes but once, He sees no more to fly. (*Sings:*.)

Stir! Stir! Skim off a tear!

Pluck away a scorching fear!

Strain a memory out here!

Lay a spicy maybe near!

It seasons well—well—well!

VITA: He loves me not. What gain I though he fold his wings? For, blind,
How see to love me?

HOPE: Love stark madness is. Shed then these petals o'er him (*giving blossom*). They shall clear His sight to lay his blindness on his brain.

(*Sings:*)

Stir! Stir! The caldron steams!

Pour in visions! Drop in dreams!

Fling in ecstasies, and gleams
Of a joy that madness seems!

It worketh well—well—well!

VITA: But if he see again, yet having wings
And no more reason, how keep him mine own?

HOPE: O senseless soul! Then lay thou hold
on him.

With the first touch of thine attaining hand
Shall Happiness become Reality.
Canst thou ask more?

VITA: Then let me die for bliss!

HOPE: Then, rather, curse not Hope's be-
devilment. (*Sings:*)

Stir! Stir! The fire 's ablaze!

Throw in Fancy's pungent sprays!

Sweet deceits and drugs that daze!

One part guile and three parts craze—

Hope mixes well—well—well!

VITA: Lo, how thou changest as I look on thee,
O Hope! Thou growest young and fair, most fair,
Most sweet and pleasant to the eye and soul.

HOPE (*sings:*):

Stir! Stir! There 's time to spare!

Here a wish and there a prayer

Make a charm that well shall wear!

Though long weeping wash it bare,

It holdeth well—well—well!

(HOPE disappears in the smoke of the caldron.
The flame flashes up, dies suddenly out, and all
is dark and still.)

VITA (*in terror*): Faith! Faith! Where art thou?

(Enter FAITH, *running*.)

FAITH: Here, for ever here!

VITA (*clinging to her*): Leave thou me not!
Hope was here, and is gone,
And the dead night breathes blackness and
despair!

ACT III

(SCENE—*The forest. After midnight. VITA and the COURT.*)

VITA (*to HISTORY*): Hast seen him?

HISTORY: Ay, we have seen trace of him.

VITA: Is that all one with seeing Happiness?

FAITH: Glimpses there have been of his wings afar.

1ST COURTIER: Methought I saw his form, but touched him not.

VITA: How seemed He?

1ST COURTIER: Hung with golden ducats round; Heavy with gold; a moving, yellow sheen; A dazzling pyramid of wealth.

2^D COURTIER: Why nay, Not so he showed when once in some swift dream I hailed him passing. He was fair and fine, But pale and wan, and had a famished look. Men called him Fame, methought.

3^D COURTIER: And when I dreamed, He wore a crown—bespattered, yet a crown, And held a sceptre bare of garnishment, But studded close with drops of ruby blood, And had a grand strong look. Men named him Power.

Oh, he did draw me with that magnet look!
I would have given substance, honour, love—
All—to possess him! But he vanished swift,
And I came never nigh enough again
To be assured 't was he.

HISTORY: He hath a shape
Baffles defining, now comes masked as War,
And now as Tyranny.

CARE: I know him not;
But to my weary longing he should look
A dreamless, ageless Sleep, with slumbrous
eyes,
And lips soft-closed on speech.

MALICE: Delusions all!
Delusions!

FAITH: I, too, dreamed of him, and dear
The dream, e'en if he not resemble it—
A gift of God, whate'er the vision be.

VITA: But I have seen him. And he is the one
Desirable of life—life's one Supreme.
And I have lost him! Endless shows the way,
And hard the road beneath untutored feet!—
The more unsufferable that he once
Hath passed this way.

2D COURTIER (*to 1ST COURTIER*): Look, friend,
if thou first come
To Happiness, then give me of thy gold,
And I, when I reach fame, will render thee
The grace of having thus befriended one
In his obscurity.

3D COURTIER (*to 1ST and 2D COURTIERS*): And
friends, if luck

Be yours, spare thou me of thy pelf, and thou
Loan me repute, and I, when come at last
Into mine own, will hold ye unforgot.

MALICE: He will remember to cut off your
heads

Belike!

CARE (*anxiously*): It groweth late. How
longer search?

HISTORY: If I do find him, I will close my
book

And write no more.

3D COURTIER (*to HISTORY*): First, prithee,
note my name.

Petty the rule ignored of History!

2D COURTIER: And mine, too, write, lest
Fame's bay on my brow
Wither at death.

1ST COURTIER: And my poor name inscribe.
The richest is not rich, if all not know 't.

MALICE: Nor rich is he, than whom one
richer lives.

CARE: And I, should chance wing Happiness
my way,
Will ask no more than sleep's beatitude.
But not for me is rest, ah, not for me!
They who on laggard, unconsenting feet
Are driven from the lovely vale of Peace
To the chill highlands of Anxiety,

May nevermore revisit that green plain;
But like the bare tree on the mountain top,
Set as a beckoning sign for clouds and storms
And tossed by tireless winds while all else sleeps,
For ever after wake and watch and dread.

(Enter TIME.)

TIME: Who says for ever? Mine alone the
word.

MALICE: What is not thine, save Happiness!

TIME: On! On!

CARE: O Heavens, where then to look for
Happiness!

Where, where is Happiness!

MALICE: Beyond the grave.

(*Exeunt CARE and MALICE.*)

TIME: Who loiters that hath my command?
On! On!

1ST COURTIER: I will get gold yet! (*Exit.*)

2D COURTIER: And I yet win fame!
(*Exit.*)

3D COURTIER: And I will yet have power, or
die therefor! (*Exit.*)

FAITH: Did men seek Goodness with a tithe
that zeal

Wherewith they labour after Happiness,
Who is there but should save his soul alive!

(*Exit.*)

TIME: The moment passes. Wanes the
night. On! On!

For ever on!

HISTORY: Oh, tide with no reflux! (*Exit.*)

TIME (*to Vita*): Thou movest not?

VITA (*suddenly returning to Time*): Great Father, show me Truth!

TIME: Truth? Truth? Pray what would'st thou of Truth at last,

Who thy life long hast held apart from her,
Accounting her a thing of evil?

VITA: Nay,
I have not loved her since I first knew choice.
Nor do I now desire her. Nay, oh nay.
Save that by her I may win Happiness,
I ne'er should seek her—ne'er should ask to know

In what dark spot and far she lies consigned,
So from her luminous vision and deep gaze
I stood for aye secure! Yet what last test
Could fright me from the search for Happiness?

I would walk barefoot over blazing coals,
Of poisoned disappointments prick me full,
Starve—thirst—freeze—burn, be slaughtered
piecemeal—ay,

Make life an hourly hell—all, all, and more,
For that poor chance of winning Happiness
In some far day I may not live to see!

Wherefore, if Truth bring me to Happiness,
Dare I face even Truth. I pray thee, then,
Give up thy long held secret! Where is Truth?

TIME: How may Truth help thee?

VITA: Happiness seeks Truth.
He loves her. Who beloved of Happiness
Will turn him a deaf ear? Hid ne'er so long,
Hid ne'er so deep, yet must he come to her,
Truth yet reveal herself to him who loves.

TIME: And what would'st thou against it?

VITA: Alas, what!
Thy words outstrip my thought. I but devise,
Knowing so surely Happiness must come
Where Truth may be, there to conceal myself
And bide his coming. So shall I once more
Behold him, once more know him near to me,
And for the rest—Hope aid me!

TIME: Hast thou Hope?
Then to gainsay were idle. Do thy will.
Who lists to Hope, hears never voice but hers.

VITA: Bring me to Truth then. Oh, how
thou art slow
When wishes fly before thee, how art swift
When wishes follow! Tell me—where is
Truth?

TIME (*indicating a cave in front of which VITA
is standing*): Beside thee.

VITA (*starting back*): Nay, not here! So
close at hand!
So swiftly reached!

TIME: Not far need be their search,
Who seek her truly. Yonder darksome way
Leadeth to Truth and Light. Heaven comfort
thee. (*Exit.*)

(VITA draws back from the cave, and watching,
presently sees HAPPINESS approaching.)

VITA: Ha, none too soon! Lo, hither through
the gloom,
Led by the lantern of his love and trust,
Comes Happiness. Now Hope, befriend me,
Hope!

(She conceals herself among the trees. HAPPINESS
draws near.)

HAPPINESS: Truth! Truth! No answer still?
Thou art not far.

I feel thy holy heart-beats through the hush,
And know thou must be near. How come to
thee?

The midnight is unmooned: the forest dense:
The way unsignalled, and I wander long.
Where art thou? I have asked the stars for
thee—

They whose pure eyes earth's darkest secrets
pierce.

I asked thee of the winds, whose odorous wings,
Soft with the scents of summer's flower-breaths,
Or salt with foam-flecks torn from scattering
seas,

Incessant sweep the earth from pole to pole.
I asked thee of the streams, whose silver feet,
Stayed by no fetter, hindered by no bar,
Search earth's remotest depths. I asked all
things:

But each gave answer: Truth is everywhere.

And so I come no nearer thee. O Truth,
I weary for thee! I have called so long
My voice grows faint. Weak Nature hath no
strength
Wherewith to mate her strongest wills. Awhile
Let me lay by my will, until I rest
That which though least, yet rules my greater
part.

(He sinks upon the ground.)

Night lies upon mine eyelids like a flower,
Humid and sweet, endrowsing all my soul;
And sleep hath flung her lasso round my limbs.
They move no more, though shadowy shapes
bend close,

Wave languorous arms, and beckon me beyond.

(He falls asleep. VITA appears.)

VITA: Yea, Sleep hath come to him. And
with Sleep, I,
Albeit he called me not. Ah, generous Sleep,
Who wresting all else from him, makes him mine!
But that I lose him not when choice returns,
I thus obey thee, Hope!

(She passes the weed across his eyes.)

Now Love, dear Love—
Thou only Love of all mine uncrowned life—
Awake! Awake!

(She draws back as he starts to his feet.)

HAPPINESS *(groping as if blind):* I hear.
(listens). Methought one called.
How blindly dark the night! I cannot see.

Who was it called? (*Listens.*) Where is the voice that called?

O Truth, how reach thee through Day's huge eclipse?

I am distraught with darkness. Speak, oh, speak,

Thou who didst speak before! I listen. Speak!

VITA: I called thee, Happiness.

HAPPINESS: Who art thou? Who? I cannot see thee if I know thy face.

How know'st thou me? Who art thou? Speak again.

O God, can it be Truth? Speak! Art thou Truth?

VITA: Prove me, and see.

HAPPINESS: How should one hope to find Pathway through so impenetrable Black?

Art thou, or art thou not? O God, give light, That I may know if this be she!

VITA: Hush! Hush! I am she. I am Truth.

HAPPINESS: Thou? Thou? Art Truth? O Heaven, break open! Let one only ray

Fall on me from above to clear mine eyes, That I may know if this be very Truth

Or basest Falsehood. How distinguish thee? In so vast gloom, who should give judgment rein?

Oh, this surpasses weakness—worsens death— This is despair!

VITA: Fear not.

HAPPINESS: Nay, wert thou Truth,
How should I fear? It is my fear I fear.
Doubt proves thee false. Wert thou indeed
that Truth

I thought thee, should my heart not credit thee,
And thou to my soul's vision stand revealed
Through all the dimness of my senses' sight?
Is Truth not brighter than the moon and stars
And daytime's sun? How should it then be
dark

Where Truth is? Nay. Thou art not Truth.

VITA: I am.

HAPPINESS: Nay. For my soul disclaims
thee. Thou art not.

I feel Truth near, yet know thou art not she.
(*Turns away.*)

VITA: O Hope, Hope, help me! See! He
goes! He goes!

But still I have a charm. (*She tears the flower
from her breast.*) Now, thou blind Seer,
Hater of all fair Falsehoods for the sake
Of one lost Truth, behold me with thine eyes.
Look on me, for my beauty cleave to me,
If not for Truth's sake!

(*She flings the flower at him; it breaks over him in a
shower of petals.*)

HAPPINESS: Ha! Once more the day!
O Heavens, I see! And lo, there is no Truth!
Great God, have mercy on my maddened soul!
I stand alone in a blank universe,

Groping for Truth, and reaching only Lies!
Oh, give me back my blindness, gracious Heaven!
Better the doubt than the despair! And thou
Who callest thyself Truth, how hate I thee
For taking on thyself so sweet a name
To cover so foul wrong! There is no Truth,
No Truth in all the world! It was a dream—
A heavenly dream—and thou hast marred it!
Fool—

Fool that I am! I have gone mad for Truth,
And Truth is not, nor aught but madness is!
O God, what frenzy 's this? My being doth
Now uncreate itself and turn to void
If Truth be not! Truth! Truth! Oh, save
me, Truth!

(*He rushes madly toward the mouth of the cave.*)

VITA (*springing to him*): Hope, thou de-
ceiver, help, or he is lost!

(*She catches the fringe of his mantle.*)

Not so shalt thou escape me, Happiness!
With these my hands I grasp thee, keep thee,
thus,

Making thee mine by very force of will!
Thou shalt not leave me! Never! Nevermore!

HAPPINESS: Lo, reason with thy touch re-
turns. Thank God.

And thank thee, Vita. Truth shall yet be mine:

VITA (*looking at him in fear*): Who art thou
whom I hold? Art Happiness—
That Happiness, whom only thus to clasp

Once was my dream of Heaven? Art thou that he?

(*She relinquishes her hold.*)

Thou hast betrayed me, Hope—undone me, Hope!

Dearer than the possession the desire!

Sweeter the dream than the reality!

(*She covers her face with her hands. Enter TIME and COURT.*)

TIME: Yonder is Happiness.

3 COURTIERS: That, Happiness?
Not so I dreamed him!

MALICE: Is it naught but this
We made such moan for and such toilsome
search?

CARE: Alas, he rests me not!

FAITH (joyfully): O Happiness,
Is 't given me to see thee, and so nigh—
To know thee henceforth what thou rightly art,
Distinguished from thy baser semblances!

HISTORY: Can it be yon is Happiness? He
seems

Unlike all things e'er named or dreamed as he!

FAITH: Therein his blessedness. What mind
conceived
Aught so divine?

ALL (discontentedly): And is this what we
sought?
This what we laboured for? Not this! Not
this!

(They draw back, murmuring. TRUTH appears veiled at the entrance of the cave. HAPPINESS flings himself at her feet.)

HAPPINESS: Truth! Truth! 'T is thou!
Thank God, 't is Truth at last!

TRUTH (*to HAPPINESS*): Thou know'st me?

HAPPINESS: Verily! With my whole heart,
Albeit confounded by thy loveliness!

TRUTH (*to VITA*): Knowest thou me?

VITA (*sullenly*): Yea. Yea. I know thee well.
I love thee not, yet must, shamefaced, confess,
Veiled though thou art, thy features hid from
me,

I know thee, Truth, and dare not cry: Begone!

TRUTH (*to the others*): And know ye me?

(She turns toward them slowly, lifting her veil, and a light streams suddenly out from where she stands, illuminining the entire stage.)

HISTORY: By all most sacred, no!
If yon be Truth, then hath my pen thus long
Been dipped in falsehoods, and indited lies!

MALICE: It hath grown strangely light!
We do look grey,

Misshapen, monstrous, seen in so white glare.

CARE: And thou the greyest, ugliest of all!
Myself shows noble by the side of thee.

2D COURTIER (*to 1ST COURTIER*): I saw thee
never rightly till this hour.
Out on thee for a miser! Avarice
Leaves no room in thy soul for Happiness.

1ST COURTIER (*to 3D and 2D*): What has come over ye? In Truth's strong light Thou 'rt but a Traitor! a weak Rhymster thou! (TRUTH still looks at them with lifted veil, and confused, all the court withdraws.)

TIME: O miserable world! O frightened fools,

Stripped a brief space of your lifelong disguise! Draw back! Not yet dare men envisage Truth! Ay, Truth, I know thee! Thou wast given me In trust, and I have hid thee from the world, Though some bold souls have dared a glimpse at thee,

And died or maddened for thy sake; and some Have hated thee for thy surpassing grace, While some have prayed for thee on bended knees,

But with shut eyes, lest sight of thee should blast them!

Not yet thine hour, O Truth! But soon shall dawn

A day when I may bring thee forth unveiled, Thy beauty to all earth made manifest, God's ultimate, and highest revelation.

Till then, pass, pass, ye anxious ages, pass!

(*Exit TIME slowly.*)

FAITH (*falling on her knees*): Till then thank Heaven, who hath accorded us The knowledge that thou livest, and the will To love thee, long for thee, aspire to thee,

If need be die for thee, O rare sweet Truth!

TRUTH (*to HAPPINESS*): Thou hast long sought
me. Come. I am thine own.

HAPPINESS (*clasping her in his arms*): Oh,
holy moment! joy vouchsafed of Heaven!
Lo, Truth and Happiness are one for aye!

(TRUTH *drops her veil*. *The light gradually fades away and twilight succeeds, as HAPPINESS and TRUTH disappear together in the cave. VITA and FAITH are left alone upon the scene. VITA throws herself upon her face on the ground.*)

VITA: Farewell! Farewell! Farewell! Now
break, my heart.

I would have done with life, who thus have done
With Happiness. O cruel Hope and false!
Oh, bitterest end! supremest wretchedness!
Oh, masterwork of woe!

FAITH: Hush, thee, oh hush!
What life is there but hides the memory
Of some dead day that once held Happiness?
What more than this hath Fate for mortal soul—
The sweet fleet glimpse of some transcending
bliss,
With tardy knowledge of a living Truth
Beyond our present reach? Enough, enough
Only to follow after; oh enough,
Seeking for Truth, to know that some far day
We shall find Truth, and with Truth, Happi-
ness!

(VITA ceases weeping, and, lifting her head to FAITH's shoulder, clings to her, comforted. The day broadens.)

CHORUS (behind the scenes):

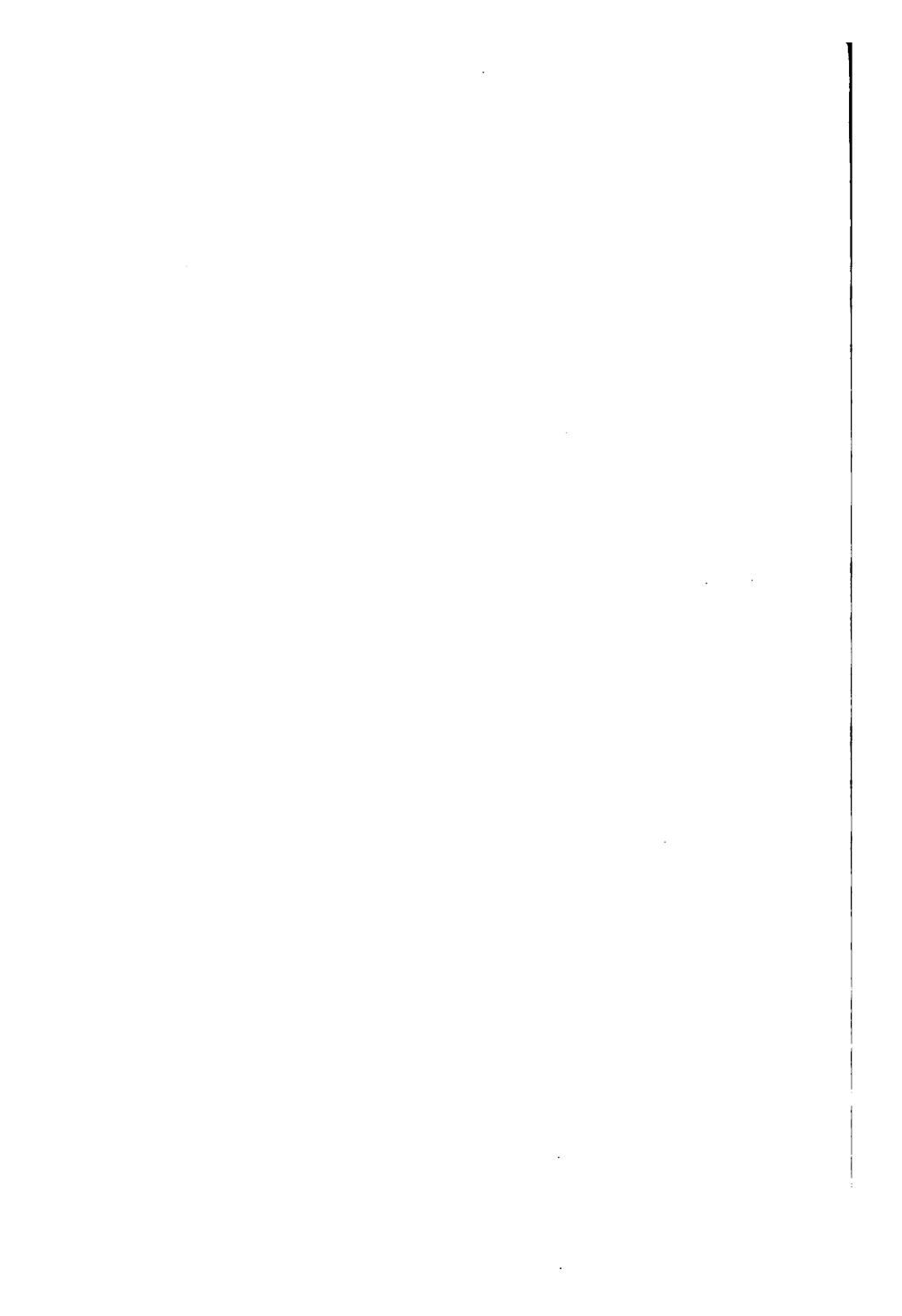
O Life! O Life! O Life!
What art thou, pray?
Desire and Fate at strife
For a brief day.
A sowing and a reaping;
A losing and a keeping;
A laughing and a weeping
Along the way.

O Life! O Life! O Life!
What art thou, pray?
A fleeting moment rife
With deeds that weigh;
A breaking, or a binding;
A forgetting, or a minding;
A scattering, or a finding
Now for alway!

(The stage is illumined with a bright light coming from TRUTH's cave, and the curtain falls with the last line of the song, leaving VITA and FAITH with their arms entwined.)



Baldur the Beautiful



TO

EDWARD HUBBARD LITCHFIELD



THE ARGUMENT

THE subject-matter is furnished by the story of Baldur, as told in the Prose Edda.

In Asgard, the city of the gods, are assembled the chief Scandinavian deities, with Odin, their father and king, who from his throne overlooking space catches occasional disturbing glimpses of Muspell, the final Heaven, whence, upon the Judgment Day of the gods (Ragnarök), is to come the annihilation of the existing hierarchy. Baldur, sometimes termed the Apollo of the North, one of Odin's sons—the *Æsir*,—is the god of light and love, or perfection. He is warned in dreams of impending peril, and Odin endeavours to save him by deputing his mother, Frigga, to demand an oath of the universe that nothing will do him harm. All take this oath except the mistletoe, exempted by Frigga on account of its weakness. By means of the mistletoe, therefore, Baldur meets his death, through the knavery of Loki, the destructive principle, better known as the God of Fire. Consternation immediately prevails. Valhalla being sacred to those slain in battle, Baldur's

soul goes perforce to Hel, and Hermod, another of the *Æsir*, mounted on Odin's wonderful eight-legged horse, is sent thither to beg his brother's ransom.

After a terrible journey, bravely endured, Hermod reaches Hel. He there obtains from its queen, Hela, Loki's abhorrent daughter, promise of the surrender of Baldur's soul, upon the condition that everything throughout the worlds shall first weep his death. If a single creature withhold its tears, Baldur is to remain in Hel, for perfect beauty and goodness are to be won only through perfect love and unanimous desire.

Hermod returns to Asgard with renewed hope. Odin issues imperative command that all shall weep for Baldur, and an unprecedented lamentation follows. Loki only, disguised as the hag Thaukt, stubbornly refuses to mourn. Hela's condition being thereby violated, Baldur's soul must remain unredeemed till Ragnarök. Upon that future day, as foreseen by Odin alone, a battle will be fought in which, after incredible marvels, all the gods, including Odin himself, will be slain. The universe will then be purified by an overwhelming conflagration, and there will be created a new Earth and a new Heaven, wherein Baldur is to live for ever. Ragnarök being, however, still far distant, the world, bereft of all that Baldur represents, continues unconcerned on its way.

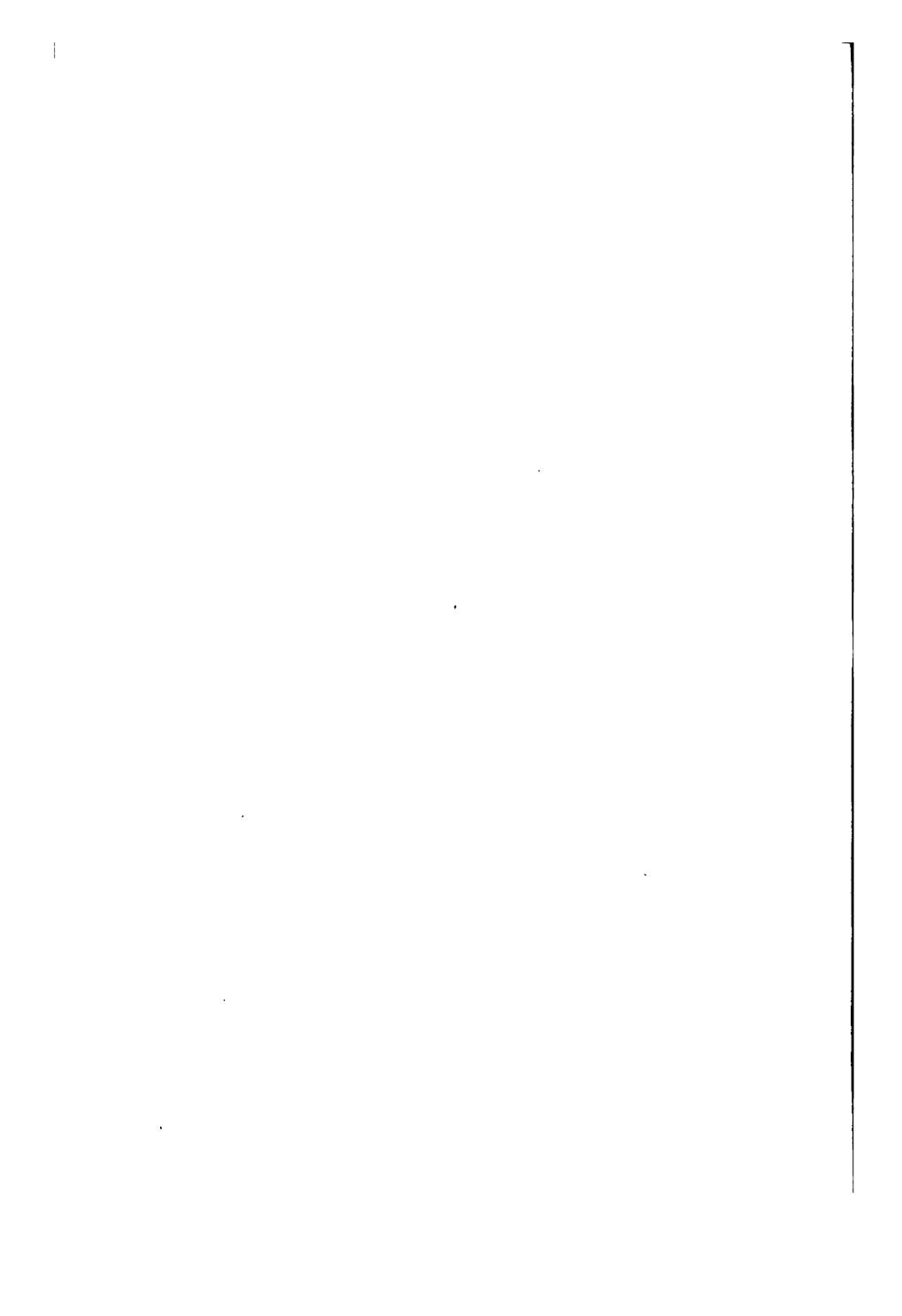
This story, dropped like a jewel among the grosser legends of the North, is surely meant to typify more than the yearly return of summer, as in the Greek myths of Adonis and of Persephone, to which it is sometimes likened. Baldur stands for that perfection of love which of itself is light and happiness, and universal woe is the unavoidable consequence of his withdrawal from the earth. As he can be recalled only through unanimous desire, a single unloving soul necessarily defeats the scheme for the world's redemption. Not therefore until humanity's complete regeneration, can love and happiness again reign supreme.

PRONUNCIATION

g always hard, like g in go.
j always like y in yard.
ð always like oe in Goethe.
Æsir-A'-ser.
As'-gard.
Bifröst-Bi'-fröst.
Fenrir-Fen'-rer.
Fensalir-Fen'-sa-ler.
Gjallar-Ge-yal'-lar.
Gjöll-Ge-yöll'.
Heimdall-Híme'-dall.
Idun-E-doon'.
Jörmungard-Yör'-mun-gard.
Loki-Lo'-kee.
Mid'-gard.
Mimir-Mim'-er.
Mod'-gur-dur.
Mus'-pell.
Njörd-Ne-yörd'.
Rag'-na-rök.
Sleipnir-Slape'-ner.
Tyr-Teer.
Vigrid-Vig'reed.
Ygg'-dra-sil.

I

Death of Baldur



I

THE DEATH OF BALDUR

LONG æons past, ere yet was count of time,
At Asgard, silver city of the gods,
Bright-built, midway among the blazing suns,
By Urdar Fount, 'neath mighty Yggdrasil,
The Ash-tree Yggdrasil, whose branches stretch
As high as Heaven, whose roots strike deep as
 Hel,
The Æsir held their court.

 There, on a throne
Set higher than the highest leap of thought,
Was Odin, the All-Father, king of gods;
Whence, at a glance, his vast omniscient eye,
Midgard, the realm of mortals, overswept
As 't were a graven tablet at his feet;
Thence, too, from Heaven's most southern edge,
 betimes
Caught the swift flash, intolerably bright,
Of a flaming falchion, where, by Gimli's Hall,
Gold-roofed, Surtur, the Mighty, patient sat,
Guardian of Muspell, ageless Land of Light—
Muspell, the supreme Heaven, whence at the last
Should flow the devastating fires of death.

And Odin, the All-Father, inly sighed,
By that fell gleam foreseeing Ragnarök,
The Dusk-Day of the gods.

A space below,

His sons, the lesser gods, the *Æsir*, sat;
First Thor, the Thunderer, with belt unloosed,
His giant mallet like a feather weight
Reclined across his knee; him following, Njörd,
Who held the master secret of the seas
And drove the winds in leash; intrepid Tyr,
Who lost his bold right hand 'twixt Fenrir's jaws;
Hermod the Swift, whose foot no dart outsped;
Bragi the Silver-Mouthed, whose spouse, Idun,
Stored the gold apples whereof fed the gods
When hoary age o'ertook them, to renew
The lustre of their Spring; Silent Vidar,
Sandalled with noiselessness; Hödur the Blind,
Stronger than seven; Frey, the God of Peace,
And Heimdall the White God, the Vigilant,
Warder of Heaven and of the Gjallar Horn,
Who heard the grass-blade split the buried seed,
And saw by night, a score of leagues away,
Clear as by noon; there, too, dread God of Fire,
Loki, the false of tongue, falser of heart,
The fair-faced sire of monsters—of the wolf
Fenrir, of Hela and of Jörmungard;
And there, best, brightest, wisest, of them all
The dearest loved, amid his brother gods
Baldur the Beautiful, surnamed the Good,
Moved, dazzling, like a flame.

What favoured tongue,
Wonted to godly measures, should avail
To tell his loveliness, his strength, his grace—
Baldur the Beautiful? No whitest flower
So white was as his brow. No snow that lay
New fallen in the sun so lucent showed.
Moulded of light he was. His radiant soul
Shone through him star-like. Day broke when
he came,
And Night was not, nor memory of gloom.
As silver rays trembling on twilight seas
Follow the flying moon, so shadowed him
A Heaven of love and joy, and the *Æsir* all,
Save one, the Dread Destroyer, held him dear
Beyond their breath of being.

Ages thus
Uncounted passed in Asgard, where the gods
Each day held council, dauntless galloping
Their fiery coursers, moonstone white, uncurbed
Over the Bridge Bifröst, the Rainbow Bridge
That spanned the cloudy gulf 'twixt Earth and
Heaven.
And there, the convocation at an end,
Supine beneath deep-branching Yggdrasil,
Content they hearkened, while, to pleasure
them,
Baldur the Beautiful sang songs more sweet
Than his who moved the stones of Thebes in line,
Or his whose loftier lyre built lofty Troy.
Of middays Baldur sang—of hot noontides

Thrilled through with pulsing gold; of silver streams

Set thick with diamonds that mocked the sun;
Of ivory blossoms gleaming 'mid the green
Like drifted summer snow; of marshalled clouds—

The sunset's standard bearers; of white gulls
Like jewelled arrows shot across the blue;
Of stars; of mellow moons; of all things bright
And warm and glad. Entranced the Æsir heard;
And as a hummingbird above the bloom
Light poised on murmuring wing, with accurate thrust

Of rapier-beak straight to its luscious heart
Gathers its one sweet drop, so breath by breath
They drank the honey of each dulcet song.

Then, on a day, there broke across the strain,
Marring its ecstasy, discordant notes
Of conflict and of darkness, that on ears
Used but to joy struck wonder, as when rain
Drops from an undimmed sky. Thus Baldur sang:

DAYBREAK

Arouse thee, O Day, and reconquer thy world!
Night's challenging banners, triumphant unfurled,

Float wide on the somnolent breeze.
The valleys lie muffled and misty in sleep.

Grey shadows, like dream-ghosts, uncertainly
creep

O 'er the face of the shuddering seas.

Arouse thee! Undo the enchantments of Night!
With tremulous pulsings and breathings of light,

Pursue as he fainting retires.

Pluck the reddening rays from thine opaline
quivers!

Slant them up at the last of the stars where it
shivers

In the ash of its faltering fires.

Unfasten thy curtainings, fold upon fold.

Set wider thy floodgates of billowy gold.

Lo, the lark is awake. He is calling thy name
From the quivering heights where the clouds are
aflame,

Ere follow the full-throated choirs.

The tops of the listening trees are a thrill
With desire for the stir of thy step on the hill,
For thy quickening glance o'er the hush of the
plain.

Come, crowned and engirdled with uttermost
splendour,

Thy glorious soul undismayed to surrender
In a breathless outburst of magnificent pain.
Re-kindle the worlds with thy limitless light.
Stand forth in unparalleled lustre and might,
Every fear to dispel, every shadow to slay,

O invincible Day!

Then peerless Odin, bending from above,
Asked whence those melancholy notes of dread
And gloom came, darkling, to the canticle?
And Baldur, all unwilling, yet compelled
By that vast eye that had his soul in bonds,
Of haunting visions told that teased his rest,
Dire dreams, foretelling peril even of life,
Whispered by Elves of Darkness in the hours
When Sleep unlocks the inner ear to sounds
Day overspeaks—dreams ill beyond concept,
Eclipsing the sweet light of all his noons
With hideous portents, laying malignant spell
Athwart life's secret tides. Blood ebb'd, breath
failed
Before his menaced doom, though whence the
threat,
Or what the unnatural skill should compass it,
He nothing knew.

The *Aesir*, sore perplext,
Pondered the monstrous tale. As when a wind
Strikes the calm sea, wrinkling its satin plane
With casual ripples that confusedly
Quiver and cross, till met and intermixt,
In gradual waves the tangled lines press on
Under one impulse goaded, each from each
So gathering impetus that, at the last,
Grown into billows swollen to giant strength,
From shore to shore they plough the ocean's
heart—
Thus dread of boded harm to Baldur, first

Uneasily the *Æsir*'s senses stirred,
Then waxed to full possession.

Now again

Spake Odin the All-Father, king of gods;
And as through angry mutterings of storm
The solemn roll of thunder breaks afar,
Resolving all sounds else to silence, so
His voice fell o'er them, and they hushed to hear.

Thus he decreed; that straightway should be
had

From fire, air, water, ether, iron, stone—
From Earth and every ore within her keep—
From all that crawled, or walked, or flew—from
all

That being had on land, in sea, or air,
In each and every star—from all wherein
Flowed blood, stirred sap, coursed ichor—yea,
from all

That moved or moved not, breathed or breathed
not, was

Or was not—oath that none would work him
harm,

Baldur the Beautiful. Thus should his days
Be free from motived ill. And since of all
Love's manifested fashionings, motherhood
Most unalloyed, most flawless, swiftest was
To see and do, nor spare itself in doing,
The mission this commandment to proclaim
Accorded should be Frigga—her who bore

With gladsome throes to Odin this his son,
Baldur, the best beloved.

The *Æsir* heard
Rejoicing, while, as ice melts under noon,
Their fear went from them. Then, as fallen
leaves

In drear dead ranks, whipped by a sudden gust,
Swirl from the ground instinct with wingèd life,
So swept they forth on that behest, to seek
The goddess in her dwelling—*Fensalir*,
Built of red gold, roofed o'er with silver shields—
Breathless o'ersprang the threshold, breathless
told

Their message where she sat serene and still,
Her face the face of perfect motherhood,
Her deep eyes glowing with love satisfied
And full. Ere yet the rush of words was done,
Her heart had sucked it dry of argument,
Leaving but sterile sounds. And lo! before
Their anxious eyes could look again, the place
Was bare of her as of a light blown out,
And she had touched the extremest of the
stars,

Bent on her wondrous task. So swift of wing
Is mother-love.

Then Baldur sang of her
This slender song—for that which fills the heart
Must voice itself, or turn to heaviness—
Though fain his insufficient lute had found
A fuller measure, fitted to the theme.

FRIGGA

Great Mother-Heart, one with infinity,
And old when stars were young,
Though all the gods together sang of thee,
The best were still unsung.

The surge of myriad seas is in thy veins.
Thy rhythmic pulses beat
Harmonious with Heaven's eternal strains.
Its winds are in thy feet.

Ruthless as Fate thou art; a fierce typhoon
When worlds thy path defy;
Yet tender as the touch of summer moon
Where sleeping lilies lie.

Oh, love transcendent, vast as breadth and
length
Of space beyond the spheres,
And mighty with the garnered grace and strength
Of all the mingled years!

As o'er the land 'twixt widest east and west
The wings of Day are spread,
So life lies folded to thine ample breast,
Nourished and comforted.

The weighty oath thus had and Baldur free,
Once more was joy in Asgard. There, for sport
Meet for high mirth, yet more to honour him
Naught now might harm, in laughter and in love

His brother gods set Baldur in their midst,
A mark against their weapons' seasoned skill.
"Stretch forth thine arm," cried one, "that I
may speed

My lance between thy fingers." "Stand secure,"
Another cried. "This cunning stroke of mine
Shall lift yon lock from thy resplendent brow."
"Hold fast!" cried yet a third. "My sword
shall cleave

The shadow from thy body." Thus they tried
Their various worth, and where by chance they
missed

Their purposed goal, the weapon fell on him
Harmless as leaf on pool, or mist on flower.
And Baldur's smile shone o'er them like a star.

One only was there 'mid the jocund throng
Who loved not Baldur—Loki, false of tongue,
Falser of heart. Doth Night love Day? Doth
Hate

Love Love? Rage shook him as his sharpened
blade

Shivered and brake against that shining breast,
Nor left a scar to point how true the aim;
And hurled he rock an Ajax might have doomed,
It fell as light from that uplifted brow
As 't were a shaken dewdrop. Blind with wrath
That like red coals upon his eyelids lay,
He hastened thence, put off his godly form
And tricked him as a woman bent with years;

So sought out Fensalir where Frigga sat
Serene and still, with eyes that looked afar
And saw but what was good.

“Know’st thou,” he said,
“The *Æ*esir hold their concourse?”

“Ay. What then?”
Asked Frigga, and her voice was like a chime
Of silver bells rung in the eventide.

“Lo, this,” he answered her. “A prodigy.
Their darts they fling at Baldur—nay, forsooth,
Naught leave untried, whate’er the weapon
chance—

With vigour of the best, and varied aim,
Yet harm him not.”

“Ay ay,” the goddess said;
And her face lightened like the sunlit sea.
“Naught lives may harm him, for I have the
oath.”

“The oath?” cried Loki, and with careful ear
Waited her word. “The oath? Who then hath
sworn?”

“All things,” quoth Frigga, “saving one alone.”

“That one?” craved Loki, and breathed not for
thirst
Of coming knowledge. “Prithee, name it me.”

Calm as the light of moon on mountain fiord,
When summer sleeps, relaxed, upon the hills,

Was Frigga's smile. "A little shrub," she said,
"That grows beside Valhalla—mistletoe
They call it."

"And it dared withhold the oath?"

The deep eyes of the goddess shone with love
Wide as the universe. "So young it was—
So pale and weak—I spared its feebleness
The waste of breath."

"It was well done," avowed
The false of heart; exultant sallied forth,
Took back his birthright shape, and straight him
hied

Thither where by Valhalla faintly grew
The little shrub, scarce lifted from the root
That gave it life, too young, too weak to flower.

Ruthless he brake it from its pliant stem,
Close hid it in the hollow of his palm,
And sped him where the Æsir jubilant
Their sport pursued, Baldr its goal and crown—
Baldr the perfect, fashioned all of love,
Baldr the Beautiful, surnamed the Good.

An arrow's flight away, sad-browed, as one
By Fate from common joyance set apart,
Hödur the Blind, stronger than seven, stood,
His sinewy arms light crossed above his breast.
Him Loki swift discerned and swifter sought.
"What dost thou here?" quoth he. "Would'st
thou alone

Spare Baldur meed of honour?"

"Nay, in truth,"

Hödur made answer, "for I love him well;
He is mine only day, and all my light.

But weapon have I none; or had I such,
How should these futile eyes find way to him,
That see not their own path?"

"Stay," Loki urged.

"Take thine allotted pleasure. Lo, this twig—
Though small, 't is somewhat, truly. Here thou
hast 't.

Thy pole star I. Put forth thy matchless
strength—

Thine uttermost. Accord him thus much grace."

Thereat Hödur the Blind, stronger than seven,
His shadowed countenance relit and glad,
Cried out in voice new-tuned to joy: "I, too,
O Baldur, dearer holding thee than all,
I fain would show my pride in thee." So crying,
As Loki guided him, struck out his arm—
His sinewy right arm—with strength of seven,
Speeding the puny missile on its way,
Unwitting whither. And before the breath
That shaped the words had spent its gentleness,
Pierced through and through to the great heart
of him,
Baldur the Beautiful lay dead.

Woe! Woe!

Ah, woe in Asgard! Woe to all the worlds!

Death the unconquerable has entered Heaven.
Black horror shook the air. Chaos uprose
From farthest Hel, distort and monstrous.

Fear

Froze every breath, cast every limb in stone.
Aghast, undone, the *Æsir* palsied stood,
With anguished eyes fast fixt where Baldur
lay—

A fallen star, in his own light enshrouded,
And coffined in the darkness of the world.
Hödur, alone amid them undistraught,
Still smiling soft, joy not yet gone from him,
Hearkened, anticipant, for answering sign,
Till suddenly the silence smote on him
As it had been a blow. Doubt, dread, despair
Gripped him and drove him forward. Thus he
came,
Precipitate, with stumbling, senseless feet,
On Baldur prostrate, bent down groping hands,
And in the agony of knowledge gave
His being up, with clamorous groans that rang
Reverberant through the wide vaults of Heaven.

Then such a cry went out from all the gods
As shook the Hel-bound root of Yggdrasil,
And tore the embedded anchors of the skies
From every mooring loose. "Woe! Woe!"
they cried.

"Baldur the Beautiful! Baldur the Good!
Baldur, our Brother!" And the universe

Rocked like a leaf, while on his lonely throne,
Odin, the All-Father, veiled his stricken face.

Lo, then, like mariners on Northern seas,
Who through the rift of storm-rent clouds behold
The midnight sun, so were the *Æsir* ware
Of Frigga in their midst, stiller than death,
Mantled in such divinity of grief
That awe fell on them like a mailèd hand
Compelling them to silence, while her words
So reached their consciousness as if to each
His own voice whispered to him in his soul.
"That son most swift, most sure, let him take
steed

And spare not spur, nor stay him day nor night
For love nor hate, for life nor death, until
He slacken rein in Hel, and there demand
Ransom for Baldur, so he come again
To Asgard, that again the worlds have light,
That Yggdrasil bear leaves, and Heaven be
Heaven."

As lightning leaps amid the brooding clouds,
Out from the *Æsir* Hermod leapt forthwith—
Hermod the Fleet, whose foot no wing outflew—
And swore by Odin's puissant scimitar
To sate nor thirst nor hunger, nor to seek
Sleep's intimate refreshment, ere in Hel,
From Hela, odious ruler of the nine
Unhappy lands, he won great Baldur back.

And as at stir of spring's awakening sap
Boughs bare as bones, flaming to sudden bloom
Are wreathèd halls for hidden choristers
That fill the air with ecstasy, so Hope
Flowed re-creating through the *Æsir*'s veins
At Hermod's oath, and all their blood ran wine.

From Odin's throne imperious command
Then came that ash-grey Sleipnir, first of steeds,
For Frigga's envoy should accoutréed be—
Sleipnir, whom none but Odin yet bestrode—
Sleipnir the marvellous, the double-limbed,
Who trod the ether as 't were pastured earth—
The swift beyond compare, each leap a flight
Immeasurable, each breath a molten flame.
Joyous sprang Hermod to the massive back;
So, for a pulse beat, in his brothers' sight
Stood imaged straight as fir on mountain top,
While to the goddess suppliant eyes he bent,
Mutely petitioning a signalled grace.
Then by the look she gave him panoplied
Against aught ill, he spake in Sleipnir's ear,
Dropped the loose line upon his stormy mane,
Struck spur, and vanished like a meteor, whilst
The *Æsir*'s shout still thundered down the dark.

II

The Journey to Hel



II

THE JOURNEY TO HEL

THE *ÆSIR*'S CHORUS

FAST! Ride fast!
Storm rides with thee!
The shrieking blast
Thy bugle be,
The long slant rain
Of the hurricane
Thy javelin.
The race begin!

Be the swiftest star
Thy chariot wheel;
The lightning's bar
Step for thy heel;
Yon comet wear
To plume thy hair;
'Mid crash and din
The tilt begin!

Ride fast! Ride well!
Death jousts with thee—

The Queen of Hel
Thine enemy.
Pay utmost toll
For Baldur's soul.
Or die! Or win!
The fight begin!

Sleipnir sped on. With his first mighty leap,
Asgard, the bright-built city, silver-walled,
Shone faintly from the distance, like a gem
Lost in the gloom; Bifröst, the Rainbow Bridge,
With burning central rib of ruby fire,
No more was than a smoking shade; Midgard,
A pallor sketched against the dimness. On
And on rushed Sleipnir, every beat of hoof
A lightning flash, a whirlwind every breath;
And high upon him, straight as masted pine,
Hermod, with brow that bent nor right nor left,
And proud eyes unaffrighted, while the stars,
Told off like milestones, measured one by one
His course through space.

Now was the outmost sphere
Only a golden memory dissolved
In nothingness. His eye where e'er it fell
Found black, bleak, bitter night—a darkness
 fierce,
Defiant, treacherous, before advance
Retreating as a wave retreats, to close
In after with an all-engulfing rush

And drown resistance—darkness horrible,
Massed here and yon in denser blurrings—
vague

Colossal shapings supernatural,
Ungodly and unhuman—ambushed fiends,
Plotting enormities.

More swift and more,
Fleeter than wind, than time, than thought
itself,

Sleipnir with Hermod raced adown the dark:
Nine timeless days fled down the frozen deep—
Nine days wherein no sun was, midnights all,
Where was no moon, nor any glint of star,
Ninefold more bitter grown each sequent hour.
Caparisoned in sheeted ice the horse:
Congealed to opals every geyser breath:
And on his back Hermod, a marble god
White as the wind-whipped foam, his plumed
head

Held high as light on beacon tower, his eyes
Flinging their challenge fearless on to Hel.

Nine days he rode—a measureless time of dread
Unfathomable. Then faintly gleamed at last
Across the blotted darkness, like a thread
Swung from a spider's loom, the Bridge of Gjöll,
Spanning Death's turbid river in an arch
Of tenuous gold; there twenty leagues below,
The mad, black billows, torn with ghastly pangs,
Flow whence none know nor whither, flinging far

Their jetty spume upon the quavering air.
Straight o'er the slender scintillating line
Flew Sleipnir, and each hoofbeat on the golk
Crashed like a falling tower. At the noise
Up rose the warder maiden, Modgurdur,
Unmatched for comeliness and strength. Am
Hermod she saw, and called to him with ve
Like rush of mingling waters. "Who art
That, living, ridest sole upon the Bridge,
Which, yester, five score dead men se
crossed,
And shook it less than thou?"

Nor right no
Looked Hermod, nor drew rein, but drop;
word
As sea-gulls, soaring, drop a loosened plun
"For Baldur's sake I, Hermod, ride the W
Of Death. Hast seen him pass?"

"Yea,
It was as Heaven had lightened in my fac

"What way went he?"

She signed with lifte
White-gleaming as 'twixt flying clouds by
Shimmers the Milky Way. "Northward,
Yet tarry thou, I prithee." Honey-swee
And warm her breath stole through the

But left
Nor right looked Hermod, nor drew rein.
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Yggdrasil,

irth anew;

Chill with a cankered damp unpurged by sun,
A dark no dawn should morrow, in whose hold
Ambiguous and indeterminate,
Lurked all imaginable chance of ill—
A terror of suggestion half conceived.
And o'er it, like the folded shroud on dead
Stark breast, lay silence awful, absolute,
Empty of calm as fear is void of peace,
A stillness as of anguish-packt suspense
Before impending doom.

While thus he stood
Transfixed, with widened eyes that naught dis-
cerned,
Sudden the immensity of loneliness
Rushed on him, caught him by the throat and
held
As 't were a thing alive and palpable;
And lo! from out the infinite vacancy
Came to him his own ghost—a self unknown,
Naked and importune confronting him—
They two alone in that vast emptiness;
And, awed, he looked his bared soul in the face
And was aghast, knowing it was himself
He chiefest feared:

As then his sight undimmed,
Far as the straining eye could reach, he saw
The torpid ether teem with shadowy souls
As teems a shaft of sun with sliding motes—
Myriads and myriads of ignoble souls,
The miserably dead, unslain in fight,

Thin outlined like a breath upon the air,
Passing, repassing, helpless wandering,
Unanchored by desire, intent, or will.
Ice-wraiths they seemed, blown into vaporous
shapes

From grey dissolving mists, noiseless as clouds,
Each drifting past the other with no sign;
Each to the other naught, as winds that meet;
Each companied in its drear solitude
By its dead self.

Astonished, thus he saw,
And for a moment's shame felt coward fear
Clutch at his breast. In wrath he freed himself
From the ungodly thrall; then first perceived
Through the prodigious dusk a faint far ray
Of promise strangely sweet, and toward it strode.
Transcendent waxed the brilliance, and he wot
Its midmost ecstasy was Baldur's soul,
Irradiating love and joy and peace
In rich effulgence, making even in Hel
A Heaven ineffable. Beside the root
Of ageless Yggdrasil he glorious stood,
God of all beauty and all goodness, which
Eternally are one, his splendour now
No more obscured by veiling flesh, ablaze
As the full sun when clouds are overpast.
Lo, in that light supernal, as within
A holy womb, had been a miracle
Of birth. Deep stirred, the root of Yggdrasil,
The Ash-tree Yggdrasil, branched forth anew;

Dead leaves at the imperious call revived;
Soft mosses creeping came with velvet tread;
Sweet sun-warmed scents and half-heard wood-
land sounds
Indefinite as sea-shell murmurings,
Made all the air a trembling ravishment;
Wan buds awoke, took back their laid-by bloom
And breathed out shaken raptures; buried
brooks
Broke their white tombs, flung their cold cere-
ments off,
Leapt laughing to the light, and sang aloud
The wondrous resurrection song of Spring;
And one by one, drawn helpless thitherward
Like sun-sucked mists, the shivering dead souls
Stretched out pale palms to the celestial gleam,
And on its burning edge hung quivering—
A nimbus round the flame; while nigher still,
Included wholly in its radiance,
A shape, diverse from these and godlier,
Depended motionless, so subtly mixt
With the enfolding light as scarce therefrom
Discernible, and Hermod knew the beam
For Hödur's thrice blest soul.

Near by, in state

Preposterous, befitting birth so foul—
Sister to Fenrir and to Jörmungard—
Grim Hela sat, Hel's most ill-favoured Queen,
Ruler of all unslain on battlefield,
The ingloriously, pitifully dead:

Nor could even Baldur's brightness re-illumine
Her livid form to hue less horrible.
On Hermod full she bent her rancorous gaze,
And as the Gorgon's snake-encircled brow
Transformed to stone who ventured glance
thereon,
So blackened Hel at the bare sight of her.

"How darest thou, unsummoned, with no taint
Of death upon thee, thus my realm invade?"
The words clashed out like rudely crossing
swords.
"What here thy purpose?"

Courteous he bent
The knee. "At Frigga's hest, great Queen, I
come,
Nor will delay to leave thee, so thou grant
Baldur the Beautiful with me return—
Baldur the Beautiful, our best beloved.
Thus only shall the lamentations cease
In Asgard where the gods their godhood mock,
Bewailing him who makes our sum of Heaven."

Thereat laughed Hela, and upon the sound
A shudder tore through Hel. "Lo, now,"
scoffed she,
And harsh her voice as iron meeting iron,
"Shall I win proof if Baldur verily
Be loved as thy unbridled speech proclaims.
Bid everything that draws the breath of life

Throughout the universe—nay, all that is,
Ev'n an it breathe not—bid all weep for him,
Compelling his re-birth with suppliant tears:
Then to the *Æsir* will I him restore,
That Asgard know again its vaunted Heaven,
And every faded star shine forth anew.
But doth one only shed no saving drop—
One only of the seething multitudes
Refuse that bidden sign—he here remains,
Unransomed, unredeemed, our flower of Hel."

"Oh, grace unparalleled! Oh, golden grief,
Itself the ransom of the woe it weeps!"
Cried Hermod, ravished. "O unbending Queen,
The eternal love of all the gladdened worlds
Reward thy clemency. Baldur is ours!
Baldur once more is ours!"

"Nay, by the gods,"
Swore Hela, "so soon is it not fulfilled.
Go thou, for I have said, and it abides."
Again she laughed. Again the floor of Hel
Shook, terrified.

Hermod on Baldur gazed,
And Baldur smiled on him; and with the smile
Shut in his heart, Hermod on Sleipnir sprang,
Cried to him once: "For Baldur's sake thy
best!"

Nor needed second spur; o'erleapt the gates,
And journeyed back the awful Way of Death.
But lo! its nameless terrors were as naught;

Nor cold, nor dark, nor any thirst he knew;
And the long course of starless nights and dawns
A single perfect moment was to him,
So did hope master time and circumstance.

As thus he came to Asgard, silver-built,
That erst shone in mid-Heaven like a sun,
Now dull and dim as an unlighted moon,
The White God, Heimdall, watching from afar,
Caught up the Gjallar Horn, and blew a blast
Surpassing ev'n that seven-day trumpet blare
Laid Palestine's beleaguered city low;
Twice valorously he blew; and ere 't was done
Re-echoing mid the stars, the *Æsir* all
Across Bifröst, the burning Rainbow Bridge,
Came swift as meteors flung athwart the sky
From fiery hearted August's catapult.
Scarce greater joy Laodamia showed
Her risen lord, re-lent for three hours' grace,
Than they to Hermod. The famed Florentine
On his high pilgrimage was not so sore
Beset by starving shades for tale of friends
Long since dispaired, as now the god for word
Of Baldur; nor more swift those shadows
plucked
The whole from scantiest beginnings, than
The *Æsir* wrested from him at a breath.

Then each, in tempered grief, as seers who hail
The desired end beyond a path of pain,

Cried out aloud with meed of moistened lids,
And struck their spears against their glassy
shields
Till all the air was rent with silver sounds;
While clear above the tempest of their cries
Rang forth the slow sad strains of Frigga's dirge,
Tender with longing inexpressible.

FRIGGA'S DIRGE

Weep, weep for Baldur dead!
For light, for beauty sped!
For fairness from all fair things fled!
Gone is our summer with its flush of flowers,
 Its purpled plains,
 Its sunset stains.
Gone are its brooks, that babbled in green bowers,
Its misted dawns, its scented dews and showers,
 Its rainbowed rains—
The glory of its golden hours
 Endarkened wholly.
Gone, gone our light of life and love!
No more the iris-breasted dove,
 Melodiously melancholy,
Croons o'er its plaint within the curtained grove.
 No daring wing the distance cleaves.
 No moth its gossamer shroud unweaves.
 No wind-awakened, lisping leaves
 Whisper their pleasure o'er and o'er
 As Day unbars her lattice door,
 Night swooning at her knee:

No more the sunbeam's glittering ball
Rebounds from silver shield and wall,
Drops from the dome o'er Gimli's Hall,
Or flashes from the sea.

No more! no more!
Evil hath laid its curse
Across our universe.

Lost is the god whom we implore.

Gloom and Despair
Foul fruitage bear,
And ice sheets cover
The stark worlds over.

Unstarred our eves; unsunned our noons;
Silent our skalds; forgot our runes;
Daytime and night are one.
Adown the desperate years
We call with steadfast tears.
No bitterer Hel can be
Than Heaven, missing thee,
Baldur—our life! our sun!

From highest heights now fell the All-Father's
voice

Surcharged with loneiy grief majestical,
Bidding the gods, as light and life they loved,
Speed forth whithersoever sun revolved
Or atom stirred, and cast command abroad
That all things to full measure of their love
For Baldur, now bewail him long and sore
With free-spent tears, if haply by such grace

Might Fate and Ragnarök forfended be.
And with the uttering of that word of dread,
On a slow sigh the great voice ebbed away,
As sighs and ceases a receding wave;
And silence held its breath for what should come.

III

Ragnarök



III

RAGNARÖK

No fleeter follows echo on the sound,
Than sprang the gods at Odin's summons forth,
Obedience and love conjoined, in speed
Outvying each his jealous brother god.
Comets a-race with comets, suns with suns,
Less swift had traversed space, and in a breath
Throughout the universe their word was told.

Grief hath been in the world since time began,
Life's first and latest birthright; every soul
Hides somewhere its unplumbed abyss of pain.
But never yet was lamentation known
Like this for Baldur, nor through time to come
In sorrow's annals shall again be writ.
No eye withheld the desired sign of dole.
Not Dante did so weep for Beatrice;
Not Niobe bedewed her marble feet
With bitterer tears for all her children slain;
Nor did forsaken Dido on her pyre
More plentiful a show of sorrow make.
Neither were hearts of human mould alone
Moved to complaint. Even the merciless beasts,

Missing their moons, most piteous mourned.

The birds

Re-tuned their chants to brooding threnodies
Sad as were his who wept Eurydice.

Yea, ev'n the careless blundering things that
creep,

Or whir, or swim, forgot their fretting wants
Before that greater want of all the worlds.

No farthest sun but shed a glittering tear,
Bedewing arid space with grief. The sky
Was all a sprinkle of wet stars. Bifrost
Pellucid gleamed through veil of jewelled spray.
The heavy-hearted clouds trailed low, and wept
In dreary monotone of melancholy;
Deucalion from Parnassus' sacred peak
Saw not so sad a flow. The drooping night
Shook moisture from her plumes. Each dew-
tipped leaf

Quivered beneath its load, and every flower
Treasured within its heart a fragrant tear.

No grass-blade but uphung the crystal sign,
No trembling tree but somewhere pricked its
veins

And bled an amber drop. The rivers ran
Hoarse with long sobbing. The disquiet winds
Waisted out their heartache through the sighing
pines.

The pale mists wavering pressed from bole to
bole

Like the dim exhalation of a prayer.

The seas upon the shingles crashed and broke,
Thundering out their woe. The shivering sands
Whispered their sorrow o'er and o'er again
In ceaseless repetition through slow hours.
The heavy breeze crept, damply odorous,
Along the sodden ground. The very earth—
The very rocks—sweated and groaned with grief,
And everywhere uprose the breathless cry—
“Baldur the Beautiful—the Good—return!”

As now the *Æsir*, satisfied and sure,
Their mission well completed, rode at ease
Their frothing chargers o'er the Bridge Bifrost
Toward Asgard bent, Bragi the Silver-Mouthed,
Wand'ring apart with heedless rein, his lips
Outbreathing Baldur's name unwittingly
As when a slumbering bird dreams out a song
Softer than memoried music, chanced upon
A quarried cell bewrayed by noisome stench
From rotting vines and oozing carrion heaps.
There, 'mid the dizzy shadows and the drip
Of mouldy walls where moist misshapen things
Or crawled, or lurked in foul black-crusted webs,
Squatted inert upon a loathsome mat
Of woven snakes sat Thaukt, her lurid eyes
Twin torches lighting up the purple gloom
With baleful fire that withered aught it touched.

Bragi, amazed, in haste unhorsed himself,
And bending his bright head, unhelmeted,

To match the meaner compass of the vault,
Found way within, and so contrived his tale
As best should wing it past a careless ear
To the heart's full conception. Thaukt, the
hag—

She who sat, squalid, on the pulsing mat—
Unmoved transfixed him with her cold bright eye.
“Naught, quick or dead, gain I by gift of tear
For Baldur slain,” churlish she answered him.
“Let Hela hold what’s hers.”

“Boundless thy gain,”
Bragi avowed, “regaining Baldur’s soul—
Light for thy murk, beauty and joy and good
For this thy misery and gracelessness.”

“To mole or bat the night is fair as noon,”
Sneered Thaukt. “That which by choice is mine,
as good

And beautiful already me beseems.
I crave not Baldur back. Till Ragnarök
Let Hela hold what’s hers.”

“Nay,” Bragi urged;
And as the wind, with age-long griefs endued,
Falters and breaks and fails and grieves again,
So shook his voice, freighted with sympathy.
“If not for thine own need, grant but a tear
In pity for the need of all the worlds.”

“What is ‘t to me,” she flung athwart his speech
With snarling tongue, “though craven dogs
night-long

Bay hopeless at the moon? Pities the sea
The shore its white lips suck? Pities the storm
The wheat its sickle slays? Pities the flame
The thing it feeds upon? Pities the gale
The leaf, the frost the flower, the worm the fruit?
Then wherefore I the grief that is not mine?"

"Not thine?" he challenged. "Sure mine ear
mistook!

Is not one spirit father of the worlds,
Through heritage of whose informing breath
All are akin? As rivers seek the main,
Merged evermore in its immensity,
Quickening currents of a common heart,
So soul seeks soul, blending in brotherhood,
Eternally interfused, eternally one—
A single pulse, athrob through myriad veins.
How then shall not another's woe be thine,
His pain thy pain, his need thine inmost own?"

"Not so," she said. "My life alone is mine.
Leave me unvext."

Then he, incredulous
That thing so weak held power to uncreate
A scheme so potent, bared of patience, cried:
"No life is his alone that lives it! Each
Imports to all, and all import to each,
Bound by the self-same law of fellowship
That links the suns each to his neighbour star.
Who art thou that deniest brotherhood?

How hast so unlearnt love, forgot compassion,
 Severed the time-old chain 'twixt thee and thine?
 Who art thou?"

"By thy showing, Hate am I,
 And Misery my chosen dwelling-place,"
 Gibing she answered from the hissing snakes.
 "Curse thee, begone! Room is not in my breast
 For love, nor pity, nor desire of good."

"Now by my sword that leaps within its sheath,
 Here will I slay thee in thy monster blood!"
 Swore Bragi, fiercely gripped with sudden wrath.
 Then calmer spake, minded her yet to win.
 "I err. Forgive. Hate slain were not love
 shown.
 Naught boots thy death. Flawless and perfect
 love
 Alone may ransom Baldur's perfect soul.
 How win thee to that love? How pity teach
 For need thou hast not known?"

Lo, as he ceased,
 And silence fell between them for a space,
 From Midgard rose the sorrowing peoples' cry,
 A low sad plaint bewailed from star to star,
 And lost upon the void in shattered sounds.

THE CRY OF THE PEOPLES

Splendour of all the worlds, O Light
 The brightest suns transcending,
 Vast as thy glory is our night

Unstarlit and unending.
Like wandering souls a-craze with thirst
 From waste savannas crying,
By phantom oases accurst,
 Who dream they drink while dying,
So we, blind-eyed and terror-bound,
 Groping through gloom supernal,
Dream that our faltering feet have found
 Source of thy springs eternal.

Splendour of all the unsunned spheres,
 Shine down these desert spaces!
Strike from our souls the numbing fears—
 The horror from our faces.
Darkness entombs us as in stone,
 Heart sealed from heart for ever.
Each wind-breath bears a smothered moan.
 Hope lifts her beacon never.
Oh, though all else the Norns deny,
 Allow our last petition!
Light! Light! Give light, or grant we die!
 Death—or immortal vision!

“Didst heed?” asked Bragi. “Needs there
 aught beside?
Canst still withhold the succour of thy tears?”

“Avaunt!” she said, and spat upon the ground.
“Thou weariest me.” And through grim lower-
 ing lids

Her fiery eyes burned knowledge in on him.

“Loki!” appalled he cried. “Loki! Loki!
For all thy strange misshapement, it is thou!
Loki! O Cruelty incorporate!
Oh, blacker than the blasted Elves of Dark!
Accurst! Accurst!”

“That which I am, I am
Immortally. Hela shall keep her own,”
Said Thaukt, and malice glittered in her face.
And now not Thaukt, but Loki, towered there,
His beauteous form upon the coiling snakes
Mounted as on a throne, his evil eyes
Lit with the inextinguishable fire
Of hate triumphant, his god’s shape distort
With joy ungodly, power malignant, grace
Ungraced, beauty for aye undified.
And Bragi knew—the certitude proclaimed
As by a searing bolt—Baldur the Good
For ever lost to Asgard. Thereupon,
Voicing an unendurable despair,
From his racked breast broke cry so piercing
shril

That all the homeward-wending Æsir heard.
Dismayed, quick scenting sorrow and defeat,
They flung their chargers round, and straight
and swift,
As shredded clouds that fly before the gale,
Sought out the sound, and at the cavern’s mouth
Formed crescent-wise, a glistening company

Of shining shields, their lifted lances like
A silver palisade, each splendid brow
In miserable suspicion sternly set.

There, at their hands, justly unmerciful,
Loki, as once Prometheus, met his doom—
To three torn crags bound trebly fast with
thongs

From out his agonising vitals wrought,
While close suspended o'er his shuddering flesh,
A serpent drop by drop spilled down its gall.
And as the isles shook when Enceladus
'Neath Ætna stirred, so quaked the palsied world
At every throb of his tormented frame.

O Ragnarök! O Twilight of the gods!
O Day of Odin feared! Till Ragnarök
Shall Loki's doom endure. Till Ragnarök
Shall Hel hold Baldur. Odin, Odin alone,
The great All-Father, in his prescient heart
Foresees its boded terrors. Bitter woe
Shall herald that late dawning; horror and
crime
Shall walk the highway bare and unashamed,
Kinship forgotten in fierce greed of gain.
Then seasons of unconquerable cold shall be
Such as no land e'er wintered—glacial frosts,
Tumultuous sword-edged winds, unhallowed
skies,

And snows from all four corners of the world,
With flakes as linted clouds. Then prodigies
Vast and calamitous shall follow swift—
Fenrir, the giant wolf, swallow the sun,
Hati devour the moon, and Jörmungard
Vomit envenomed floods, stars drop like rain,
Midgard scatter its hills as dust, its seas
Toss out as bursting bubbles. In that hour,
After uncounted ages still to dawn,
Shall Heaven itself be cleft in twain, and through
The immeasurable breach, from Muspell, Land
of Light,
Shall all her sons come, Surtur at their head,
Surtur the Mighty, helmed and shod with flame,
His sword the sun outshining. And beneath
The tread of that indomitable host,
Bifröst, the Rainbow Bridge, like shivered glass
Shall crack and splinter.

Then shall Heimdall seize
The Gjallar Horn, and blow a hideous blast—
The cry of ultimate fear, whose note of doom,
Beating from frightened world to world, shall
die
In utter wastes beyond. Even Yggdrasil
Shall tremble through its branched and rooted
length.
In that dread day of Ragnarök shall naught
Be unpossessed of terror.

Nathless, led
By Odin the All-Father, king of gods,

Arrayed for death in timeless majesty,
The Æsir, with Valhalla's warriors,
Shall range them on the bewildering battlefield,
Vigrid, the field of blood. There shall attend
Muspell's resplendent band, apart and still,
Proof-clad in brightness unapproachable.
And there shall gather all Hel's followers,
With Loki and his fearful progeny
Freed from their mammoth chains—Fenrir, the
wolf,
The stretch of whose vast jaws encloses Heaven,
And Jörmungard, the serpent, he whose tail
The round of Earth encircles in its coil,
And Garm, the dog, worst monster of the three.

Then dazzled, blinded, frenzied, shall the gods
Rush on their doom, foe leaping upon foe
In such a conflict of inordinate strengths
As since Titanic times, when thunderbolts
Were arrows, hills were slingstones, hath not yet
Been known to story. Odin with the wolf
Shall furiously engage, nor bear himself
Less resolute than did Olympian Jove
Contending with Typhoeus for his throne.
But skill nor valour shall advantage him.
For as relentless Night upon the Day
Creeps step by step, beats back the radiant
shafts
With huge black bulk opposed, stretches agape
Stupendous red-rimmed jaws and inch by inch

O'ertakes and swallows up its glory, so,
With one last straight-armed thrust of flashing
spear,
Shall Odin die.

Then tenfold multiplied
Shall fury animate the warring hosts.
Fenrir, sore wounded, shall in Vidar's grip
Yield his foul breath. Thor, magic-gauntleted,
Shall slaughter Jörmungard, and ere his foot
Hath pressed nine paces onward, shall lie prone,
Stifled with its black gall. Heimdall shall leap
On Loki, and they twain, fire blent with fire,
A blazing one, as one shall fail and sink—
An extinguished flame. Ev'n thus intrepid Tyr,
With Garm in combat, shall lie dead beside
His strangled foe. So each shall seek his mate,
Inexorably armed with equal rage.
So each shall fall, victor by victim slain—
One triumph, one reward, one death for all.
Alone the sons of Muspell, radiant
With lustre insupportable, shall still
Aloof and silent stand, their dazzling breath
Outblown upon the wind like fiery flowers
That blossom as they perish.

Then, ah, then
Surtur the Mighty shall unfold the gates
Of the far South! Swift from the luminous land,
Muspell, shall pour an incandescent flood
In mass and brilliance comparable to naught
The mind hath power to image, that shall sweep

From end to end of the wide universe,
Worlds, with their moons, for fuel piled on worlds;
Suns tossed on suns; systems on systems heaped;
Meteors for sparks, comets for kindling straws;
And at the last, to the minutest ash,
Extinction absolute; space cleansed and bare.

So shall the imperfect order of the old
Be done away, as Odin, king of gods,
Anguished foreknows; and from the Land of
Light,

From the bright bosom of its burning seas,
Shall rise amain a new fair firmament
Star-filled: a new sun in the highest Heaven
More glorious than all the suns that were,
And a new Earth, lovely and verdurous,
Whose day shall end not, nor whose summer fade.
And lo! a new Asgard shall be again,
With nobler halls, where greater gods shall keep
A more exalted state. And in their midst,
Won back from Hel, sceptred and crowned with
light,

Baldur the Beautiful shall live for aye,
And Night, and Hate, and Woe shall be no more.

This Odin's vast omniscient eye foresees,
Piercing futurity with wisdom bought
From Mimir's limpid well, and evermore

The knowledge like a wanton weed o'erruns
The garden of his thoughts. But in his soul
He shuts the vision close, and dwells apart,
Disjoined by wisdom, from the multitude.

Thus still he sits, majestic and remote,
Upon his disillusioned, darkened throne,
Watching the moving worlds, aye and anon
Catching the gleam, intolerably bright,
From far Muspell; then bows his august head,
And murmurs: "Ragnarök!"

And still doth Heimdall blow the Gjallar Horn;
And still the *Æsir* their white horses ride
Across the Rainbow Bridge with idle shield
And lowered lance; still meet in Asgard's Halls,
And under mighty Yggdrasil discourse
Of great deeds done and greater yet to do—
Thor with his mallet, Tyr with handless wrist—
Reck not of Fenrir, nor of Jörmungard,
Safe fettered both, with Garm, the monster dog;
Laugh when Earth trembles under Loki's throes;
Taste of Idun's well-guarded golden fruit,
And, young again, forget dread Ragnarök—
Somewhat, as swift the centuries slip by,
Forget ev'n Baldur.

But, from Fensalir
Where Frigga sits, who listens close may note
Day following day, year following year, a sigh

Upon the fainting breeze float softly past,
May see a tear drop with the dew, may catch
A distant cry of love unutterable—
“Baldur! alas! Baldur, my son, my son!
Baldur the Beautiful! Alas! Alas!”



The Nun of Kent

A Historical Drama



TO

ROBERT UNDERWOOD JOHNSON

151

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

EDWARD BOCKING
ROBERT DERING
RICHARD RYSBY
HUGH RICH
HENRY GOOLD
CUTHBERT VANE
THOMAS CRANMER
HUGH LATIMER
THOMAS CROMWELL
ELIZABETH, *The Nun of Kent*
MISTRESS VANE, *Mother of Cuthbert*
MISTRESS COBB, *Former Mistress of Elizabeth*
PRISON ATTENDANT

GUARDS, SOLDIERS, FRIARS MENDICANT, OBSERVANT
FRIARS, PEASANTS, ETC.

*The scene is laid, first in Canterbury, and afterward in
London*

ACT I

(SCENE I—*The square outside the Priory chapel of Canterbury. CUTHBERT standing a little apart. MISTRESS VANE and MISTRESS COBB talking. A procession of Pilgrims issuing from the chapel doors, and continuing to pass, brokenly, during the scene. A few peasants leave its ranks to join the two women.*)

OLD PEASANT: A goodly saint,—a goodly saint enow!

SECOND PEASANT (*awestruck*): Seemed she not wrapt and fearsome?

THIRD PEASANT: Past concept.

FOURTH PEASANT: I am a-tremble yet.

SECOND PEASANT: My knees turn weak
To think on 't. Where then was her soul, the
while

Her body lay there breathless? Was 't in
Heaven?

VOICES TOGETHER: Ay! Ay!

THIRD PEASANT: Heard'st thou
not Father Bocking tell
Her holy state in paradise, mid sights

And sounds earth scarce may dare to think
upon?

MISTRESS COBB: Ay, marry, a right fa-
voured saint is ours.

Give heed to her.

MISTRESS VANE (*scornfully*): All England
heeds but her.

MISTRESS COBB: That doth it. Our sweet
Saint Elizabeth,

Our saint of Canterbury, Nun of Kent,
Hath wider fame than any in the land.

OLD PEASANT: Who would ha' thought it
five twelvemonths agone
Of orphaned Beth, our little village lass?
Oh, fair enow, but no wise wonderful.
Nay, ower light, and trifling in her speech.

MISTRESS COBB: Tut, tut! A king needs
grow through babyhood,
Yet no less king is when he dons the crown
Because he erst was hushed on woman's knee
And fed on pap.

CUTHBERT (*turning toward the group*): Nor
she thereby less saint,
That she hath leapt so sudden to such height?

OLD PEASANT: It was a miracle our Lady
wrought.

SECOND PEASANT: A miracle in guerdon for
her faith

What time that fever lay so hot on her,
When she did pray our Lady lend her grace.

| OLD PEASANT: Wherefore our Lady came,
and with a touch
Healed her and made her saint for that her faith.

CUTHBERT: For that her faith in priests—no
fairer faith!

'T was the priests sainted her.

MISTRESS COBB: Go to! Go to!
One reasons not with thee. Thou lost thy lass
That day we won our blessed saint of Heaven,
And dost begrudge us her.

MISTRESS VANE (*proudly*): My son 's no one
To grudge a maiden to ye. Keep your saint!

OLD PEASANT: 'T is pity, though. He loved
her sin' so long.

CUTHBERT: Prithee, have done. Thy pity
runs to waste.

Our Lady, with that selfsame holy touch
That sainted Beth, did heal me of my loss.
I leave thee thy sweet saint. She's none o' mine.

(*Exit.*)

OLD PEASANT: Brave words make goodly
corselets o'er weak hearts.

MISTRESS VANE: Beshrew thee! Cuthbert's
none to mourn a lass,
Or make lament for a spoiled kiss or two.
If Heaven proclaims her for a saint, it sure
Counts him no lack of honour that he first
Won her whom Heaven did later thus becrown.
What heart of us, but Cuthbert, guessed her
worth?

I 've heard thee rate her, Mistress Cobb, full oft
And sore, in saintless days at Aldington
When she o'ermuch did dally at her task,
Or flirt too many of those graces out
That Heaven—and Cuthbert—so approved in
her.

MISTRESS COBB: No sign o' saintship was
upon her then,
When she was serving wench to me and mine.
That swear I by all saints.

PEASANT: Good Lord! Beware!
Ye speak o'er freely of who is a saint.

MISTRESS COBB: I mean her no disgrace.
I bate my breath
And sign the cross when I bespeak her now.
Have I not journeyed sin' cockcrow, to pay
Her dole for prayer I one time paid for wage?
She bears me naught of malice. But to-day
I lost her a good groat to pray for me
And mine.

MISTRESS VANE: I ween she 'd pray thee out
o' Heaven,
For half o' that she takes to pray thee in.

PEASANT: Sir Thomas More a double ducat
gave
To say an Ave for him.

MISTRESS VANE: That must be
Dire needed grace which cost so mickle gold.

PEASANT: Wot ye that book writ of her
oracles?

Archbishop Warham brought it to King Hal.

MISTRESS VANE: The king made merry o 't.

MISTRESS COBB (*warmly*): Yea! Wot ye
why?

Her holy revelations ill do fit

His will. Had she decreed that Catherine
Was well divorced and Anne was lawful queen,
The king with hot haste had put faith in her.
But sin' she doth denounce this lustful bond
The while Queen Catherine lives, therefore,
forsooth,

Hating the truth for loving of Queen Anne,
The king makes truth a lie to keep Anne queen,
And disavows God's saint.

MISTRESS VANE (*impatiently*): This Nun of
Kent

Doth lead the English people by the nose—
Priests, prelates, nobles—all, save but the king.

MISTRESS COBB (*sneeringly*): The king and
thee, shrewd Mistress Vane. I ween
She led once e'en thy Cuthbert in such wise.

OLD PEASANT: Poor little lass! She was a
winsome child;

Had a gay laugh, and a light foot to dance,
And a sweet voice to sing.

MISTRESS VANE: A wilful lass,
With never head to learn nor hand to work.
And her the priests have made a saint of—Beth!

PEASANTS: Our Lady's grace! A miracle!

MISTRESS VANE (*shortly*): Was need.

OLD PEASANT: There 's never night but angels
visit her
Within her cell.

SECOND PEASANT: And once the archfiend
came
To wrestle against Heaven for right in her.
Hast seen the mark he burnt upon her arm?

MISTRESS VANE (*contemptuously*): A birth-
mark, hidden in unsaintly days
With a smart riband!

PEASANT (*angrily*): Nay, it was himself
Laid his hot hand upon her, and her flesh
Scorched in quick horror of so near approach.
Ask Father Bocking!

MISTRESS VANE (*going*): Ask the archfiend's
self!
(*Exit.*)

MISTRESS COBB: How she doth hug her
sinful disbelief!
She hath an untamed spirit and a strange.

PEASANT: So her son Cuthbert. Holds his
head as high
As my Lord Bishop. Wears his vest as proud
As 't were an ermine mantle. Hath no word
For peasant folk.

YOUNG GIRL: Nor smile for any maid.
He is an austere man, grave, hard, and cold.

MISTRESS COBB: Cold now, in that he loved
so hotly once
He burnt his heart to ashes—so methinks—
Though fires that kindle slowest, smoulder long.

YOUNG GIRL: 'T were sin to love a nun with
human love,
And she a saint. Sure now he hath forgot.
MISTRESS COBB: Mayhap. Try thy warm
smiles there an thou wilt.
They 'll melt the granite sooner.—Well, good
folk,
We have long gossiped. I must hence, and
home.

(*Turns away.*)

PEASANTS: And I. And I. The day is
wearing late.

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II

(*The Priory Hall. FATHERS DERING, RYSBY,
RICH, and GOOLD in the foreground, drinking
and dice-throwing. FATHER BOCKING in the
background, walking slowly up and down.*)

DERING: Prithee, pass on the flagon, Father
Goold.

(*To RICH.*)

Bestir thee, Friend. A song to cheer the hour.

RICH (*sullenly*): Rouse Father Rysby. (*To
GOOLD.*) S'death! the throw was mine.

GOOLD: By sainted Thomas, never!

DERING: Here. The bowl.
(*To RYSBY.*)

Now, Father, drench those thirsty lips of thine,
And give us a rare tune, a sumptuous strain,

To drive the echoes of our Matins' plaint
From out these dull old walls.

(*He snatches back the flagon.*)
Drat thee! Begin.

RYSBY (*chanting dolefully*): A-ve-Ma—

DERING: Faith, we're deaf with Aves! Blast
Thy tongue!

BOCKING (*coming forward*): Truce to your
guzzlings! Drop those dice!

'T is nigh upon her hour.

GOOLD (*continuing to throw*): How harms it
her?

DERING (*drinking*): A taste hereof may lend
her weakness strength.

Best call her shortly ere the flagon fail.

BOCKING (*coming nearer*): I said give o'er.
Hark ye; give o'er ye must.

DERING (*putting down flagon sulkily*): I wot
not wherefore.

RICH (*looking up from dice*): Who made thee
our lord?

BOCKING (*deliberately*): Myself, out of mine
own pre-eminence.

(*He stands looking at them significantly.*)
DERING: And we obey thee out of ab-
jectness

Of this our serfhood to thy greatness? Good.

RICH (*mockingly*): O blest harmoniousness!
Behold us one

In lowly-mindedness!

RYSBY (*stretching himself at full length*):
In lethargy,

Say rather. Easier were it to obey
Him who asserts himself, than to contend
Against the assertion. Father Bocking, speak.
I listen acquiescent.

(*To GOOLD, motioning toward a cushion.*)
Pass it here.

GOOLD (*putting it under his own head*):
Thou'rt fat enow to want none. Leave
it me.

RYSBY (*indolently*): Truth. Thou art lean
with listing ower long
To rosy-lipped confessions of sweet sins.
Thou mayest keep it, Father. Be it soft
As penance dealt to fair-cheeked penitents
By thine indulgence.

BOCKING: Fools! What prate ye of!
Doth naught more urgently compel your
thoughts
Than the dull routine of the clostral day—
The bootless, sapless, dead monotony
Ye call existence?

RYSBY: Why uncharm our peace?
'T is a soft-feathered nest.

DERING (*drawing up the flagon*): Where
wine fails not.

GOOLD: Nor low-voiced penitents to shrive.
RICH (*folding his hands across his stomach*):

And where

The Matin bells ring not too loud a peal
 O' frosty mornings, nor brown-roasted ducks
 Have too pale sauce at vespers.

BOCKING: Prattle o' babes!
 Is there no nursing soul among ye all
 Sucketh some saving discontent?

DERING: Yea, then.
 I'd brave damnation for a spicier draught—
 A redder, rarer, richer, madder wine!

BOCKING (*coming close to him*): Do as I bid
 thee. Thou shalt quaff a wine
 Had never peer in Canterbury's best.

DERING: Hey? Thou hast pass-keys to
 the Bishop's vault?

BOCKING (*meaningly*): I have a key where-
 with I will unlock

A door shall let thee to thy bishoprick.

DERING (*rousing*): Faith, that were nobly
 done. 'T would please me well
 To don the mitre. What 's this magic key
 Shall so My-Lord me?

BOCKING: Follow thou my lead.
 Myself will robe thee bishop.

ALL (*breaking into laughter*): Thou!
 DERING (*shrugging his shoulders*): He mouths
 His speech as were he my Lord Cardinal!

BOCKING (*lifting his right hand solemnly*):
 Lord Cardinal I shall be.

(*The monks look at him startled.*)
 DERING (*impatiently*): It appears

Thou 'rt not afraid to step high—with thy words.

BOCKING: Feet follow where words climb.

RYSBY (*raising himself on his elbow*): Thy ladder show.

Be it nor frail, nor steep, nor slack of base,
What is 't shall stay us mounting after thee?

BOCKING (*still more solemnly*): Do but my bidding, and ere many moons,
Honours ye dream not of shall crown your faith.

(*He comes into the midst of the group,
slowly scrutinising each in turn.*)

Are ye all one with me?

GOOLD, RICH, AND RYSBY (*impressed*): Ay.

DERING (*after a pause*): Ay.

BOCKING: To death?

DERING: An it be death first robes me
bishop, nay—

I thank thee, Friend, better becomes me cowl.

BOCKING (*raising his clenched hands high
with sudden passion*): Oh, miserly life
that will not give itself

In payment for its wishes! Hark. My soul
Starves for the cardinalate, and though I reach
To snatch it through the molten doors of hell,
Yet will I not give o'er. What! Live on here
This hemmed-in, miserable, mapped-down life,
Crushed to a level, indistinguishable

In one grey mass of insignificance?

Thrice better death than life's oblivion!

Thrice better death—thrice welcome, if so be
Higher than I stood living, it stand me dead!

DERING: Oh, meek son of our holy Mother-church!

Aptly such speech adorneth thy sworn lips,
Bleached with slow litanies and lowly creeds!

RYSBY (*sinking back and clasping his hands under his head*): Choose thy style,
Father, Cardinal or Pope,

As pleaseth thee. Who swooneth at no
height,

Certes comes farthest.

RICH (*going to BOCKING and laying a hand on his arm*): Here. I join with thee.

Ambition is a generous lord to serve.

RYSBY: Rather a monster tyrant, niggardly
Of wage, of service most exorbitant,
Whose bait 's a poisoned arrow in the flesh,
Whose guerdon is a keener lash o' the whip.
All they who follow in his glittering ranks
Forfeit content as their enlistment fee.
Nathless, if drum allure, enrol thee, pray.

DERING: Two fools for one.

(BOCKING *looks round angrily*.)

RYSBY (*interceding good-humouredly*): Whist.
Whist. Let the word pass.

Its savour falleth harmless from thee.

GOOLD (*rising*): Troth,
By thine own marking we be all fools here,
With cowls for caps.

(He looks down at his monk's dress.)

I sicken of this jest.

(He crosses over to BOCKING.)

Thou 'rt in the right of it. Show the way out!

RYSBY: I drift where strongest currents draw. To float

Is seemlier than to battle with the tide.

(He draws his hands from under his head to count off on his fingers.)

Three of thy mind.

(He rises slowly to his feet.)

The vortex sweeps me in.

How is 't, pray, Father Dering? Hold'st alone?

DERING (to BOCKING): What plottest thou? If but a tournament

Of tongues—words set a-tilt to amuse the world—

I'm naught for 't. But, so be it is of deeds—Deeds to be done, schemes to be battled out, Great purposes to grapple with, to twist Into strong knots or hammer into shape By sheer out-putting strength—I leap to arms!

BOCKING: Thy hand, Friend!

DERING: First show thine.

BOCKING: So did I. This The stake I play for. Fame. High office.

DERING: So. And thy trump ace?

BOCKING: Elizabeth of Kent.

DERING: The Nun?

RICH and GOOLD: Our new-fledged saint?

RYSBY (*unwillingly*): Methinks e'en now
Hath she o'er served us.

BOCKING: I have measured her
And know her powers.

DERING: Number them us.

GOOLD: Sweet eyes,
A dimpled chin, a mouth that pouts to kiss,
And cheeks a-blush for the mouth's wayward-
ness—

These be great powers!

RYSBY: But win not bishopricks.

DERING: What hath she saving comeliness?
—frail prop

To rest a ladder on!

RICH: The maid lacks brains.
An ignorant lass. A very babe for thought.

BOCKING: The better for our needs. Blind
faith serves best.

RICH: Docile she is in truth.

DERING (*contemptuously*): Obedient
As echoes are.

BOCKING: She holds her teachings fast:
Her childish faith yet faster. By the rood,
There's never tool within the universe
So fitted to our hand!

RICH: She plays the saint
As one inspired of Heaven.

RYSBY (*apologetically*): She doth deceive
Herself before all others.

BOCKING: 'T is on that
My scheme is builded. When five years agone
I first beheld her in that trance, and heard
Her, senseless, babbling forth strange pulpit
lore

Held, parrot-fashion, by her ignorant ear,
Then laid I my mind's finger on her—then—
Guessing an aptitude for mimicking
At will of mine, as by command of God
And for high use, those swoons miraculous
Whereof a timely physic bettered her—
I challenged fate! To this end have I worked;
Thereto have moulded her; thus far alone.
Now must ye work with me. The hour is ripe.

DERING: Good. Show us of thy scheme.

BOCKING: By yonder maid,
The Nun of Kent, to shake a dynasty.

RYSBY: Great Heavens!

DERING: Speak on!

BOCKING: By yonder mindless maid,
The Nun of Kent, to fire all England's blood
To white-heat acts, dethrone a lawless king,
Crown Mary lawful queen, restore the Church,
And bring our country on repentant knees
To the lost jurisdiction of the Pope.

RYSBY: A breathless scheme!

RICH: Impossible!

DERING: Oh, bold!

Oh, daring, mad and perfect! (*To BOCKING.*)
Here! My hand!

GOOLD (*anxiously*): A mad plan, truly.
Mad. And dangerous.

DERING (*turning on him*): And thou 'rt
afeard, I 'll cut thy tongue out, knave,
And let thee loose.

RYSBY (*conciliatorily*): Peace. Peace.
Give breathing space

To view this matter in.—Dethrone King Hal,
Sitting so high up with his ill-got queen
And making merry with the heretics
Against the Church? Nay, I 've no love for
him.

But to conspire against him, take his throne,
Build up another power—'t is a big thought,
That on my stomach sits uneasily.

BOCKING: Strong meats take slow digesting.
Bide thy time.

Thou 'lt grow to it. Once Mary on the throne,
The heretics are banished, Pole recalled,
The Catholic Church once more supreme, and
we—

GOOLD (*uneasily*): Ay, we?—sobeit we may
not fall amuck
O' the headsman—?

DERING (*exultingly*): Ha! I scent arch-
bishopricks!

BOCKING: We who have built shall have the
builders' meed
From her for whom we buildest—Catholic Mary.
(*A pause.*)

Enough. Keep your own counsel, and keep
mine.

(*He retires into the background and resumes
his slow walk.*)

RYSBY: What complot this, by all the powers
of Heaven,
To drop i' the midst of us! Dethrone the king!
Crown Mary!

GOOLD: And the Nun for instrument!

RICH: Now what a mind the man hath!
What a brain,

To snatch at circumstance and fashion fact
To fit his rude intent!

DERING: A master mind!

GOOLD: And we its vassals?

DERING: No shame, though so be.
High serving honours him who serves, and mind,
Like water, finds its own just level. Ay!
I hail him Master!

RYSBY: Whist! Yon comes the Nun.

SCENE III

(*The same. Enter ELIZABETH. BOCKING advances to meet her.*)

BOCKING: Daughter, o'er long I wait.

ELIZABETH (*penitently*): Father, forgive!
I was a-weary.

BOCKING: Faints thy soul so soon?
Gird thee with resolution and toil on.
The children of the world may tire; not thou.

ELIZABETH: Must I do penance therefor?
Woe is me!

This honourable saintship is a cross
To soul not born to it.

BOCKING: Daughter, beware!
Thy feet have far to travel on high roads;
And they to whom vouchsafed so holy goal,
May own no self to draw their purpose back
With importune complainings.

ELIZABETH (*humbly*): Father, nay.

BOCKING: They live but in so far as they
achieve.

Themselves are nothing; their identity
Blotted from sight in their accomplishment.

ELIZABETH: Shall I account myself so little
use?

BOCKING: Count thyself little? Heavens!
Pray, what art thou?—

An atom in a universe of mites.
The merest naught, in an immensity
Of moving cyphers. Nowhere canst thou find
A narrower bound of insignificance
Than thine own narrow soul.

ELIZABETH (*piqued*): And yet, methinks,
So great a task allotted me, concedes
Somewhat of worth in e'en so small a thing.

BOCKING: Oh, vanity of creature! Is the
vase
By virtue of its contents brass or gold?
Thou, thou art nothing. But thy task is—all!

ELIZABETH: And if I fail? Will God be very wroth?

BOCKING: None fails whom God appoints to service. Strength matches the need; hands shape themselves to fit the given tool; backs bend to bear the load.

DERING (*coming to her side*): Do but his bidding—that, thy talisman!

ELIZABETH: Yea, Father, yea! For ever, and in all.

BOCKING: The test is nigh. There is accorded thee A marvellous mission. Daughter, thou art called To be thy country's saviour.

ELIZABETH (*recoiling*): Saviour?—I? Nay, Father, nay! It is enough of grace But to be Saint Elizabeth of Kent, And fast long hours, and lead a separate life, And wear a bit of sackcloth next my heart.

(*She draws nearer, and pushing back the nun's coif, lifts the hair from her forehead.*)

Father, my flesh is very tender. See! I doubt me could it brook a crown of thorns. And must I, too, be crucified? (*In sudden terror.*) Nay! nay!

Saint though I be, yet mortal am I still— Pain-fearing and joy-loving. Let me from 't! I could not brave the shame—the agony— Not e'en to be a Saviour!

RYSBY: Hush, poor lamb!
Thine ignorance is blasphemy. A cross
For thee! a crown of thorns!—dear Lord,
forgive!

RICH (*sneeringly*): Thy conscience doth wax
newly tender, sure!

BOCKING (*to ELIZABETH*): Poor foolish heart,
that sets its own weak throbs—
Its small fleet pangs—against a future fame!
But dread nor cross nor crown, Elizabeth,
Sainthood too high, nor too great martyrdom;
Thou art not formed thereto.

ELIZABETH (*eagerly*): I crave it not.
To be a saint, and so feel sure of Heaven,
Yet not so much a saint but that I may
Retain somewhat of earth, sufficeth me.

RYSBY: To be content with what one hath, is
Heaven.

BOCKING (*impatiently*): This earth hath no
contentment! That we call
By so poor name is but surrendering
Our slavish necks to whatever yoke there be—
A dull acceptance of the inevitable,
A lifeless bearing of some dragging cross
Our cowardice dares not free us from. Nay!

Nay!
Ambition, aspiration, hope, are naught
But discontent endowed with angel wings.
'T is better starve for the divine, than feast
Upon unworthy meats!—Elizabeth,

What wert thou when I found thee? Simple;
poor;
Untaught; despised of all.

ELIZABETH (*softly*): Nay, not of all.
There was one loved me.

BOCKING: Now, contrast thy state.
Commissioned prophetess of Heaven's decree—
The faith, the pride of multitudes. And lo,
Thine award is but half granted. Thou shalt on
To fame immortal as high Heaven.

ELIZABETH (*sorrowfully*): Ah me!
Hath God some revelation newly sent?

BOCKING: To thee; not yet to all.

ELIZABETH (*sighing*): Ay, Father.
BOCKING (*solemnly*): Kneel.

(ELIZABETH *kneels*.)

Hast thou confess to-day?

ELIZABETH: My every sin.
BOCKING: Hast thou had absolution?

ELIZABETH: Father, yea.
BOCKING (*peremptorily to the monks*): Kneel!

GOOLD (*muttering*): Is 't for long?

RYSBY (*pushing down RICH*): Let me assist
thee, Friend,

To the unaccustomed rite.

BOCKING: My Daughter, hark.
There have this day in deep ecstatic dreams,
Been shown me mighty things. All I have seen,
All I have heard, may I no man declare.
This only was I bid reveal to thee.

ELIZABETH (*crossing herself*): I listen.

BOCKING (*slowly and forcibly*): Henry, who now England rules, Rules not himself. Henry, whom God made king, Obeys not God. Henry, whom Heaven did crown, Defieth Heaven. And lo! his hour is come. This England, that he rules, shall out-rule him. God, who did crown him, shall strike off that crown, And Heaven, that was his aid, abandon him.

ELIZABETH: Oh, poor King Henry! poor King Hal!

BOCKING: Put by
 Thy puny pity! Know but scorn for him
 Who calling himself monarch, is yet slave
 Chained to his smallest, weakest, vilest lust!
 Who, sitting on a throne, conceives he shows
 Vice regal, so he lift it to his side!
 Who thinks he makes crime lawful by high sins
 In consecrated places! Spare thy grief,
 And lend thee to the speedy furtherance
 Of Heaven's great purposes. Dethrone the king,
 And crown his daughter queen!

DERING: Oh, royal scheme!

ELIZABETH (*aghast*): Nay, what can I in so grave matter?

BOCKING: All.

GOOLD (*aside, rising*): My knees wax lame.

RYSBY: Methinks it were no lack
Of reverence to edge a cushion in.

*(He pulls up a pillow and gradually
slips into recumbent position.)*

DERING *(absorbed in BOCKING's words):*
Whence got yon man his power!

RICH *(scowling):* From Heaven—or hell—
It matters not.

DERING: Wondrous concept!

BOCKING: Arise,
Elizabeth of Kent! Stand forth! *(To the monks.)*
Behold!

Do ye here one and all engage yourselves
True followers of this our saint?

DERING, RICH, and GOOLD *(heartily):* We do!
BOCKING *(to RYSBY):* Thou, Father, answer.
RYSBY *(reluctantly):* The crowd sweeps me on.
Perforce I follow.

BOCKING *(to ELIZABETH):* Here be five of us
Sworn to command in this most righteous cause.
Without waits all of England that we come
To mete out justice in the name of Heaven,
Whilst thou, here, there, and yonder, as I bid
Thee speak, shalt lend in secrecy thy voice
To syllable God's will.

ELIZABETH: In secrecy?
BOCKING: So great a truth thrown open on
the world,
Would blind with its immensity of light.
Through thee it shall fall softly on veiled eyes.

ELIZABETH: And thou wilt train my tongue
to speech?

BOCKING: The same
As Heaven hath deigned teach me.

ELIZABETH: And is it bid
I still avow the revelation mine?

BOCKING: Thine is the revelation, I its
voice,—
Thus Heaven doth shield its frailer souls,—
lest thou,

Sudden admitted to such mysteries,
Should'st perish, blasted with their ecstasy.
But thine the revelation—thine, not mine.

RYSBY: Truth. Thine, not his.—Blest Mary
and dear Christ,
'T is a droll world we live in!

ELIZABETH: A strange world,
And I, methinks, the strangest figure in 't.
I no more know myself. I am unlike
All that was me. First was I little Beth,
With a rare lover, and no thought or care
More than the singing bird that seeks the sun.
Then came that sickness on me, and so thou
Didst call me in God's name to be a saint.
And I did put my youth and lover by.
Then was I St. Elizabeth of Kent,
And did long penances and made great prayers,
And taught the folk all thou hadst taught to me
Of law, and of God's anger with the king;
And so grew famous, and less happy far.

And now what am I? What must grow to be?
More than I am, yet oh! less than I was;—
My country's Saviour—and unhappier.
Can one be made great with a little soul?
This greatness lies upon me like a pall,
Covering my dead youth with a sombre state
That bids me weep.

BOCKING: There speaks the village lass—
No more the saint.

ELIZABETH: Father, forgive the maid,
Who in her sainthood misses her lost self.
Death, consecrator of all things, makes even
Our dead selves not unworthy of our tears.
It is a passing tribute. I have done.

BOCKING: Hail, St. Elizabeth of Kent, our
chief,
Our guide to truth, to victory, to power!

ALL: Hail, hail, thrice hail to St. Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH (*falling on her knees*): God help
me! I am wondrous frail and weak.

BOCKING (*inciting the others*): Hail! Hail!

ALL: Hail, St. Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH (*weeping*): Ah me!

(*The curtain falls.*)

ACT II

(SCENE I—*The square outside the Priory. The chapel on one side. The convent of St. Sepulchre on the other behind high walls. A brilliant moon floods the scene. CUTHBERT seated on a bench in the foreground. MISTRESS VANE standing near. The chapel bells chime, followed by twelve slow strokes.*)

CUTHBERT: Midnight. How lag the hours!

MISTRESS VANE: Son, Son, come home!

CUTHBERT: The moon makes night forget
her errand. Hark!

Was that a gate jarred yonder?

MISTRESS VANE:

Cuthbert!

CUTHBERT:

Peace.

Hark! (*Lists anxiously.*)

MISTRESS VANE: Nay, 't was nothing, no-
thing.

CUTHBERT:

'T was a hope

Stirred low within me.

MISTRESS VANE: Wherefore watch so long?
What good can it betide thee though she come?

CUTHBERT: What good? Ay, none. 'T is
slaking my mad thirst

With salted water. Yet the parching tongue
Still drinks.

MISTRESS VANE: Out on thee! Shall love
bind thee aye
In serfdom to such folly? Be again
A man. Shake off this despicable thrall
It shames thee to remember.

CUTHBERT: Folly? Shame?
A despicable weakness? These be names
For woman's love—not man's.

MISTRESS VANE: Or man's or maid's
As liketh thee, but leave off loving!

CUTHBERT: Ay.
When I shall leave off living.

MISTRESS VANE: Fool! Pluck love
From out thy bosom! Rouse thee! Be at heart
The cold proud man thou puttest on by day.

CUTHBERT: I weary waiting. Send her forth
to me.

MISTRESS VANE: Others there be a plenty
at thy call.

Get thee another love.

CUTHBERT: Go send her forth.

MISTRESS VANE: Now that I will not!

CUTHBERT: Pass through yonder gate,
Unbarred—by miracle!—that she be free
At will o' the chapel road, when prayer con-
strains.

The way is open to her cell. Knock soft,
And bid her come to me.

MISTRESS VANE: I go not hence.

CUTHBERT: Bid her make speed. I wait
her coming long.

MISTRESS VANE: She sleeps by this.

CUTHBERT: She doth not sleep. She wakes.
Am I not wakening?

MISTRESS VANE (*tries the convent gate, finds it
unlocked, hesitates, and turns back to*
CUTHBERT):

Prithee, list; give o'er
A love that doth unman thee. Yon frail lass
Was aye unworthy thee.

CUTHBERT (*turning upon her fiercely*): Be
still!—And go.

MISTRESS VANE: Was ever love like this!
(*Exit reluctantly through convent gate.*)

SCENE II

(CUTHBERT alone.)

CUTHBERT: Was ever love
Unlike my love? Then never was that love.
A love that metes itself out thus and so
According to the measure that it gets—
A love that yields itself to reason's check
And may unmake or make itself at will—
A love that prates of worthiness in one
It loves—counts out the virtues—sums them up
As thus and whys for loving ere it loves—
That is no love at all, nor needs a name.
But love as I know love, a madness is

Saner than reason; oh, a weakness is
Stronger than strength, a folly above wit.
Not for the love she bore me loved I her,
Nor for my joy in her, nor for the need
I had. I loved her because Love, one noon,
Descending out of space, chanced where we were,
Wrapped us in its huge shadow, blinded us,
Took her and me in its titanic grasp,
And shook our souls together.

(He relapses into silence, then springs up and stands listening intently.)

SCENE III

CUTHBERT (*standing. Enter THE NUN. Mistress VANE comes out from the convent with her, and disappears behind the chapel.*)

ELIZABETH (*softly, from the distance*): Cuthbert!

CUTHBERT (*holding out his arms, without moving from the spot*): Thou!

ELIZABETH (*coming nearer*): Cuthbert!

CUTHBERT (*springing suddenly toward her*): Beth—Beth—my little Beth!

ELIZABETH (*motioning him back*): Nay, soft. Come not anear. Not little Beth I am, But St. Elizabeth—the Nun—the Saint— And thine no more. Thou may'st not come so nigh.

I have outgrown thy love.

CUTHBERT: Nay, little Beth,

Thou hast outgrown thine own love. Mine
thou hast

Not yet reached up to—nay, nor ever canst.

ELIZABETH: Thy loving must be very great
indeed,

To stand so high above me—I a saint,
And pinnacled anear to Heaven!

CUTHBERT: Thou!

Thou art no saint, Beth. Thou art only Beth,
Grown thus much older, tricked out as a nun,
And taught a longer, sadder way to pray;—
Only my little lass, priest-caught, and dragged
From out her world to one she fits not.

ELIZABETH: Truth.

I was not fitted to it, heart nor soul.

I would have given all my sainthood up,
But to be left with thee and be thy wife,
And live my little humble glad life out
In unambitious quiet by thy side,
If but it could have been!

CUTHBERT: Prove these thy words!
Give up the falsehood now! Come forth with me,
And be my very wife! Oh, better far
Be true man's wife than false priests' fraud!

Come Beth,
Thou heart and soul of me! Thou dearer self!

(*He springs toward her. She retreats.*)

ELIZABETH: Stand back! Away from me!

No profane hand
May dare approach me!

CUTHBERT (*drawing back*): Hath the hand of
love

Aught in 't of desecration? Mistaught child,
What can thy priests reveal to thee more pure,
More holy than love is?—Fear not. Fear not,
Thou little mimic saint—thou sweetest lie
That ever stole Truth's garb—thou fairest fraud
That ever fooled men's sense! I 'll touch thee
not.

What boots it? We are cleft too far apart
For any bridging of the difference.
Thou 'rt fallen from me, Beth, not grown from
me,
Else had I borne it.

ELIZABETH: Thou art bitter! Thou!
Thou, once so tender with me, thou alone
Holding me high when others held me low,
Now thou alone of all disclaimest me.
Cuthbert, take back thy words. They stab me
here.

(*She puts her hands to her breast.*)
Rather I would the whole world thought me
false,
And thou hadst faith in me. Seest thou not
Thy doubt professeth so a doubt of God?

CUTHBERT: Thou dost deceive thyself, Beth,
and the world.
Me thou canst not deceive. I love too true.
ELIZABETH: I do prefer thine old ways,
the old names

That rang so softly—the old blind dear love
That owned no fault in me when I had most.
Oh, I have not forgotten! I recall
Through all the dignity of my high state
Those days when I was nothing save to thee,
And owned naught, save thy love. And oft—
oh, oft!—
My soul is sick with longing—sick to pain—
With yearning for those days, and thee.
Chide not.

I know such speech is sin—know I must make
To-morrow penance therefor. But to-night—
To-night I cannot put this sweetness by.
I knew thou cam'st to-night. I felt thee near,
As April feels the bourgeoning in her blood
Before the bloom unsheathes. And in my heart
The old love burst its bonds and leaped to thine,
As breaks the torrent through its frozen shroud
At call of summer sun. Oh, dear my love,
Let me remember but this one night more,
And be thy Beth again! See, 'neath my cloak
(she divides its long folds)

I have put on the gown I used to wear,
And on mine arm the riband—on my neck
The chain that thou didst give me.

*(She throws off the Nun's cloak and hood,
and stands dressed in a peasant's
costume.)*

Cuthbert, see.

Am I not fair to-night as then I was?

CUTHBERT (*covering his eyes*): Beth—Beth—

ELIZABETH (*slipping the chain through her fingers as if it were a rosary*): I have such pretty trinkets now,—

Such jewels, Cuthbert! Thou should'st only see.

Good Father Bocking holds them for the poor, For saints may love no vanities, he saith.

The people bring them to me for my prayers; And gold, too; but the baubles please me best. 'T is pity nuns forswear them. They show bright

Across the black, and do become me well.

Sometimes at dusk when I have done my beads, I deck me out in them, breast, arms, and hair, And stand back—thus—and lift my head up high, And fancy I'm a queen,—and long for thee! Tell me—thou art so still—am I less fair?

CUTHBERT: Would Heaven thou wert, or that I thought thee so.

ELIZABETH: Then am I grown less dear? What merit lacks?

Hast thou no little pretty word to say For but this night, dear Cuthbert—but this night?

CUTHBERT (*hotly*): Why only for to-night? Is love a gem

To put on or fling off as folly bids? Not only for to-night, but for alway List to me, Beth!

ELIZABETH (*wistfully, drawing nearer*): I am
not grown less fair,
Less dear to thee?

CUTHBERT (*passionately*): By Heaven, thou
art more vain,
And foolisher, less worthy and more weak,
Yet—O God!—dearer—dearer—dearer!

ELIZABETH (*wounded, and drawing back*): Nay!
Not vainer! Nay, more humble am I grown,
Being more worthy than I was of old.
How else were I made saint? Thou dost not
dream

The life I live—all penance, study, prayer.

CUTHBERT: Leave off such lessoning! The
priests blind thee
With the allurements of their serpent wiles.
Have done with this long mummery. Come back
To thine old childlike truth and loyalty.

ELIZABETH: Time was there when it vexed
me sore to know
I might not leave this new life for the old—
Give up all else and keep but thee. But now—
O Cuthbert, God hath called me to great things—
Greater than love of thine could e'er devise.
I may not give the great up for the less.
One may not choose one's life out—wife or saint.
One is what God ordains. See. I do wrong
In meeting thee to-night. Ay, I do wrong
In loving thee. The saintliest of all hearts
Are those that love not, Father Bocking saith.

Yet I, though singly honoured thus of Heaven,
Find it so hard to unlearn love—find love
So lovely still.—Hush, Cuthbert! This to-night
Is my farewell. I will not see thee more,
Nor love thee—from to-morrow. These black
folds (*she resumes her nun's cloak*)
Shall be the graveclothes of my love. Thy Beth,
Thy little Beth is dead. Here. Take.

(*She unfastens the chain and holds it out to him.*)

Take back

Thy chain; it binds too closely to thee yet;
I may not keep it. I have work to do,
And thought of thee unnerves me for the task,
And must not creep between.

(*The chain falls from her outstretched hands to the ground. He grinds it under his heel where it lies.*)

CUTHBERT: Would God I stood
For ever betwixt thee and all mischance!

ELIZABETH: Thy hurt hath warped thy brain.
Didst thou know more,
Thy love itself would not withhold me now.
A revelation hath been granted me
Through Father Bocking. Mock not, Cuth-
bert! Hear
How God hath chosen this same witless lass
Whom thou so scornest athwart all thy love—
Do the words prick thee?—to work out His
will,

Her, and those selfsame priests thou dared'st
defame.

All hath been ordered. But a little space
And Henry who is king, is king no more,
And Mary is our queen!

CUTHBERT: Thy morrow's screed
Gotten by rote. Well conned. Yet here is none
To gape at thee. Thy scholars sleep.

ELIZABETH (*gently*): Forbear
Thy mockery. The truth still wears truth's face,
Unaltered by thy sneer.

CUTHBERT: Or by thy boast.
Words shall not make King Henry less a king,
Or Mary sooner queen.

ELIZABETH (*significantly*): Wait, scoffer, wait!
Look close! Words may go first, but armoured
deeds

Shall follow with loud footsteps!

CUTHBERT (*sharply*): Deeds? What deeds?

ELIZABETH (*impressively*): Deeds that shall
make King Henry no more king,
And crown his daughter queen.

CUTHBERT: Great God, what plot
Is this!

ELIZABETH (*pleased to have roused him*):
The plot that foreordains the fact.

CUTHBERT: Fact?—*Treason! Treason!*

ELIZABETH (*shocked*): Nay, dear Cuthbert,
nay!

Treason is wrought of men. This is an act

Decreed of Heaven. The king hath angered God,
For Henry hath done ill, and God commands
We shall dethrone him. We do but effect
God's will.

CUTHBERT: O gracious Heaven, what black
abyss

Of crime is this! what direst wickedness!

ELIZABETH (*very gravely*): Now Heaven for-
give thee! Doth God counsel crime?

CUTHBERT: God? This is Devil's counsel!

Child! These priests

Decoy thee into lurid hell! Beth—Beth—
When have I ever lied to thee? I swear
By that white love that binds our souls in one,
This thing they plot is treason black and vile!

ELIZABETH (*moving off*): How dar'st thou
so to judge God's holy law?

'T is blasphemy!

CUTHBERT (*following her*): Nay, listen, listen,
Beth!

I yet must save thee!

ELIZABETH (*retreating*): What would'st save
me from?

From serving God and serving this my land
As never maid but one hath served before?
Now were I weak indeed, now truly frail
For wrath of thine to stay so high resolve.

(*She passes quickly through the convent
gate and bars it. He presses after her,
flinging his weight vainly against it.*)

CUTHBERT: Beth! Beth!

(She moves back to the convent door, and throwing it open turns and faces him from the threshold, the darkness behind her, and the moon full upon her face.)

ELIZABETH: Thou dost mistake me. Beth is dead.

I am Elizabeth, the Nun of Kent,
Saviour of England, and God's servitor.

(She disappears through the convent door, and closes it behind her.)

SCENE IV

CUTHBERT *(alone. He slowly withdraws from the gate, and stands still in the centre of the stage.)*

CUTHBERT: Is there a Power above that looks on this

And suffers it to be so?—sees a soul
Out of its very guilelessness and trust
Dragged down to hell, nor lifts a staying hand?
Is it or God or Devil rules us? Speak!
Proclaim Thee, God, by burst of holy wrath
Shall sweep Earth clean of its iniquities!
Art Thou all-perfect and canst brook such wrong,
Rewarding greed with gain, and crime with chance,
And sin with stainless tools? O God! O God!
Or is there no God and no Devil—naught
Save a vast superstition we call fate?—
Naught higher, stronger, holier than himself,

For man to reach to in a desperate need?—
Oh, agony—oh, hell of helplessness!

SCENE V

(CUTHBERT and MISTRESS VANE.)

MISTRESS VANE: Yet here? Hold'st thou
the ground she trod so dear
Thou canst not leave it?

CUTHBERT (*passionately*): I hold nothing
dear

In the wide earth,—nor herself, nor myself,
Nor thyself, who did'st bear me for this hour!

MISTRESS VANE: Was it such joy to bear
thee, dost thou think,
Thy hate compensates for the birth throes?
How

Am I despoiler of thy destiny
Giving thee life? Hate first my mother, save
For whom I had not been to bear thee.

CUTHBERT: Nay.
Earth hath not room enough for all the hate
Should fill it, did men hate where hate were due.

MISTRESS VANE (*her voice changing*): Nor
space hath only for the love that fills
A single mother-heart.

(*She comes up to him tenderly.*)

O Cuthbert! Son!
Would God thou wert again the little child
Upon my knee, to whom the mother-love

Was all sufficient for the moment's need;
Now outgrown hast thou the sufficiency,
Yet not the need.

CUTHBERT: Forgive! The poisoned heart
Drops gall on whom stands nighest.

MISTRESS VANE: To forgive
Were to concede offence. Sweet son, come home.

CUTHBERT: Home? What is home? A gar-
den space, where hopes

Set i' the sun grow tall like tended flowers—
An Eden, where glad hearts contented wait
Their dreams' complete fulfillings. Wherefore
those

For ever done with joy and hope, for them
No home is.

MISTRESS VANE: Faith, thou 'rt wrong.
Home is a shrine

For spent sick souls to creep to and be healed
By miracle of love. Come thou with me.

CUTHBERT: There is no succour for me in
God's world—

Nay even not in thy matchless mother-love.

A task is on me of such magnitude

All my unequal flesh revolts. Hark! Hark!

*(He turns to her, speaking low and fast
and with intense bitterness.)*

If there were one more dear to thee than life,
Who, sleeping, walked, thou vainly following,
One pure from sin as is the driven snow—
Who in that blinded trance—thou vainly by—

Leapt to a rotting branch that bridged a chasm,
And stood so, sleeping, dreaming, smiling, death
And hell agape beneath her naked feet—
One dearer than thy life—whiter than snow—
What bitterer torture could thy heart endure?

MISTRESS VANE: Sure, none!

CUTHBERT: Sure, none. Yet say, if she,
sleep-locked,
Stood smiling there, and thou—awake—aware—
For conscience' sake—for country's sake—
O God!—
Must strike that quivering bough with thy live
foot,—
Thyself must thrust it down to fiery hell
With her upon it,—her more dear than life,
More pure than snow, more helpless than a
flower,
More innocent than ever babe that breathed—
O God, hath hell a horror beyond this?

MISTRESS VANE: I cannot follow! Hath thy
speech import?
What craze is on thee?

CUTHBERT: Would to heedless Heaven
It were the illusion of a frenzied brain!
Why must I do this thing? Why must it
be

The one who loves her—out of all that live—
Now must betray her? I! O Mother—I!

*(He staggers away, and drops his face on
his raised arms.)*

MISTRESS VANE: His love hath maddened him!

CUTHBERT (*recovering himself and forcing himself to speak with calm*): Nay, nay, not love,

But pity. Pity for such innocence
Yoked with such sin.

MISTRESS VANE (*incredulously*): Who sins?
The Nun of Kent?

CUTHBERT (*bitterly*): Ay, this high saint.
She most unsaintly sins.

MISTRESS VANE: What frantic words are these! How should Beth sin?

CUTHBERT (*rapidly*): Mother; those monks,
—those hell-begotten fiends—

Plot treason! They are banded 'gens the king,
By what fell scheme or craft hell only sees,
With Beth to countenance it as God's will!

MISTRESS VANE: Monstrous! most monstrous!
Canst not save her, thou?

CUTHBERT (*lifting both hands to Heaven, with a groan*): I can betray her. Ay. Betray,
I can.

MISTRESS VANE (*thunderstruck*): Betray her?
—Beth?

CUTHBERT (*fiercely, though with an effort at self-control*): What else? Am I a knave,
To leave these knaves unpublished?

MISTRESS VANE: But—the maid?
CUTHBERT: I must.

MISTRESS VANE: Thou canst not.

CUTHBERT (*hopelessly*): Must doth override
Life's cannots.

MISTRESS VANE (*wringing her hands*): Son—
the doom is death!

CUTHBERT (*in agony*): O God!

(*He steels himself to quiet.*)

Then dies she, too, with those her fellows.

MISTRESS VANE: Dies!

CUTHBERT (*fiercely*): Whom am I sworn to
serve? Henry or Beth?

Henry is England.

MISTRESS VANE (*weeping*): Beth is thine own
self.

CUTHBERT: To save mine England, thus I
slay myself.

(*More gently.*)

Tempt me no more. Would'st lure me to the
wrong

With thy divine compassion?

MISTRESS VANE: Were it crime
To bide thy peace, and leave the event to God?—
Only to bide thy peace?—Is it a sin
To close the lips on speech heard out of place
By ears untimely open? Leave it God.

Why must *thou* speak?

CUTHBERT (*bitterly*): How should I hold my
peace,
Knowing the evil? Can I wink at it,
And be as knew I not? This God of thine

Is slow of justice, else were many a sin
Strangled at birth, that stalks forth now full-
grown.

At need men do God's work.

MISTRESS VANE (*overcome and dropping to her knees*): O God! help! help!

CUTHBERT: If prayer can find out Heaven,
pray God help Beth.

(*He turns away.*)

MISTRESS VANE: Thou goest?—Now?—So
instant?

CUTHBERT (*gently*): Mother, farewell.

(*He stoops and kisses her.*)

MISTRESS VANE: Thou goest?

CUTHBERT: Canst thou ask me if I bide,
My king in peril, and I English born?
I go. If so be thou canst find God, pray!

(*Exit.*)

(*Curtain falls.*)

ACT III

(SCENE I—*A cell in the Priory. FATHER BOCKING writing. Enter FATHERS DERING and RYSBY. The latter flings himself down on the pallet.*)

RYSBY: Divinest rest! No greater good hath Heaven!

BOCKING (*pushing back papers and looking up expectantly*): Ye only? Father Goold—?

DERING: He follows soon.

RYSBY (*absently*): How may feet follow shortly so long road?

BOCKING: And Father Rich—wherebide they?

DERING: For the nonce

With Masters.

BOCKING (*sharply*): Wherefore?

DERING (*shrugging his shoulders*): A new brand this morn

Uncasked.

BOCKING: Sots! They would travel twenty leagues

To taste a wine, who care not go a rod

To win a mitre!—Masters—what his word?

DERING: He waits our summons.

BOCKING: Ere long shall he hear
The trumpet call. Archbishop Warham——?

DERING: Sends
His holiest greetings to our sister-saint:
Commends her boldness in the Lord; approves
Her revelation as God's righteous word,
And lends his prayers to speed her on her way.

BOCKING: His gold were better.—Salisbury
—what from her?

DERING: The Countess standeth to us, and
the same
The Marchioness of Exeter, with all
Their chaplains, households, servitors, and
squires—
A goodly number.

BOCKING: And Sir George Carew?
Lord Rochester? Sir William?—How with
these?

DERING: The same.

BOCKING: Good. Good. What
more of Rochester?

DERING: My Lord petitions Heaven for its
sweet grace,
And meanwhile dons his armour.

BOCKING: That's the prayer
Shall speed us farthest. And from Abel (*to*
Rysby)—Thou,
Father, what message? (*To DERING.*) Pluck
that pillow out.
He sleeps a'ready.

RYSBY (*snatching at pillow*): Hold there!
Peace! Good Lord! (*Sinks back.*)

BOCKING (*sternly*): What word?

RYSBY (*sighing*): Alas, sweet sleep! (*Rises.*)
Well, Father Goold,

Ogling a lass or two along the way,
And dining off fat soups and goodly wines
To strengthen his weak apostolic soul,
Thy matter unto Father Abel brought.

BOCKING: And he—?

RYSBY: Did bring it to Queen Catherine
Through the confessional. So holy road
Perforce must sanctify it, Father—eh?

BOCKING: Speak but thine errand. Leave
thy fantasies
To curl around the slimness of thy prayers.

RYSBY: Well thought. They do lack some-
what of past grace
Since I to prattle treason tuned my tongue.

BOCKING (*impatiently*): Father, I pray,
thine errand! What hast more?

RYSBY: Her Majesty that was, Queen
Catherine,
And Princess Mary—Majesty to be—
Did lend two royal ears most worshipful
To the blest message from our holy Nun.—

(*Muttering*): Faith, it may stain them
somewhat!

DERING: By the mass,
The hour is come to strike!

BOCKING (*exultantly*): The tide is full!

RYSBY (*reluctantly*): And bears me on its bosom. All too far

The appealing quiet of receding shores!

BOCKING: Ay, all too late to hark back to the long

Relentless level of the pallid strand—

Too late to sink upon the sands and sleep.

High runs the flood of my ambition! Strong, Indubious, swift, the current of my will,

Compelling onward toward a consummate sea!

RYSBY: There must I swim—or sink.

So be it, then.

At worst an easy death.

BOCKING: Nay! nay! a prize

Worth having lived and died for. Power!

Power!

SCENE II

(*The cell of the Nun of Kent. Early morning.*

ELIZABETH, in a boy's suit of mail, buckling on a light sword, etc.)

ELIZABETH: I wonder was she fairer than I am,

This maid they tell me of—this Joan of Arc?

She was a peasant, Father Bocking saith, Scarce more than child. So I. And she was good.

Yet Heaven did make me saint, and not so her, Though she saved Spain—or France? Ay,

France it was—

Such courage had she. She led men to war.
Now that I could not. I could stride a steed,
Or bear a banner, but I fail of strength
To look on blood and carnage. I turn sick
At thought of pain. How bore the soldier maid
The awful memory through after nights?
What reaped her valour? I must ask anon.
Perchance, for award, God let her just be glad
In her own way, alone with one she loved.
Joan. Joan. A solemn name. But Beth,
breathed low
And lingeringly, as though his lips were loath
To part with so dear sound—I like it best.
Ay, sweeter 't is than St. Elizabeth.
Ah, Love, could'st see me now!

(She looks at herself in delight.)

I look so tall,
And show so shapely in my silver mail!
(She turns her helmet admiringly in her hands.)
And this white plume hath droop more maidenly
Than sombre veil of Nun. I am that Joan
Come back to do a nobler deed than hers.
For England is the greatest of all lands,
And I save England, where she saved but France.
I must fast well to do so holy work,
And make a many prayers to compass it.
I must be very saintly. It was sin—
That thought of Cuthbert. O dear Lord, give
grace!
I am not fain to love him, but the love

Is older than my sainthood, and more strong.
I wonder did this Joan a lover have,
And did to leave him drain her heart of blood?
Would not she, too, had choice been granted
her,
Have foregone all Fame's laurels but for this—
To make home fair for him and win his smile?
Shame! Shame! I must not think unholy
thoughts.
Yet why was love created if 't is sin?
Why given so lovely aspect? Get thee hence,
Deceiver! leave me passionless and calm.
The day of trial dawns. I must to prayer;
Must purge my heart of its minutest fault,
Must cleanse each thought, and fit my feeble
soul
To meet the mighty moment.

(*She kneels, wringing her hands.*)

O dear Lord,
I asked no fearsome honours of Thee. Why
Didst set me on these perilous heights, nor
give
With saintship somewhat too of bravery
To bear its penalties?—Dear God, I fear!

SCENE III

(*ELIZABETH and BOCKING.*)

BOCKING: Daughter!

ELIZABETH (*rising in frightened haste*): Here,
Father.

BOCKING: Art thou yet equipped?

ELIZABETH: All, save my prayers.

BOCKING: 'T is well. (*Points to helmet.*)

Cap thee and come.

Yonder an armèd throng awaits thee. See
Thou speak to them alone the appointed words.

(*She tremblingly puts on helmet, then
shrinks back.*)

ELIZABETH: But yet a moment, Father.

I would say

An Ave.

BOCKING: Thou may'st say thy fill the morn.
This day hast thou to act—not meditate.

The instant presses.

ELIZABETH: Nay, a moment more!
I have not asked God's blessing on me.

BOCKING: Come.
Thou shalt have all the night to pray in. Deeds
Are day's best prayers.

ELIZABETH (*sinking to her knees*): Father,
I am afraid!

BOCKING (*roughly*): Out on thee! What
hath come to thee? Afraid?

Thou—England's Saviour—is it thine to quail?
What fearest thou?

ELIZABETH: Alas, I know not what!
An agony of terror rends my soul.
Is it an angel that would warn me back
From tasks too great for my endurance? Oh!
I fear! I fear!

BOCKING: It is thy country's call!

(He comes nearer and catches her by the arm, pointing eagerly outward.)

It is the voice of England—the great voice
Of a great stricken land—entreating thee.

Thou tremblest? Ay, what soul stood not
aghast

Fronting the spectre of King Henry's doom!
Thou art afraid? Yea. Yea. So vast the
affront,

So slight the hand to avenge it, so divine
The guerdon! Joan, too, thus a brief space
shrank

Before the glory of her mission. Thus
She, too, first feared, then dared to conquer.
Know,

There is a fear braver than courage is.
That fear be thine.

ELIZABETH: Father, thy speech lends
strength.

Where wait those I must hearten? Bring me
yon.

I will breathe out thy spirit into theirs—
Will flash thy soul upon them—make them
brave!

Haste, Father! Hasten while thy spell yet
holds,

And fire lights my tongue!

BOCKING: Come, Daughter, come!
(Exeunt.)

SCENE IV

(*A large hall in the Priory. Mendicant and Observant Friars. FATHERS DERING, RICH, GOOLD, and RYSBY moving among them incitingly.*)

FRIARS: The Nun! The Nun! Fetch us the Nun!

RYSBY: Betimes.

GOOLD: She cometh, comrades.

DERING: Bide her holy will.
She waits upon the Lord.

A FRIAR: She prays so long
Our swords rot in the sheath.

RICH: Down with King Hal!

DERING: Is no King Hal! Hath not our blessed saint Diskinged him and uncrowned him in God's name?

FRIARS: Ay! Ay! We have no king!

DERING: But have a queen!

RYSBY: Or shall have, in God's season.

FRIARS: Ay! Our queen!
God save Queen Mary!

SCENE V

(*The same. BOCKING ushers in ELIZABETH.
Later soldiers enter.*)

DERING (*in a loud voice*): Heaven's Ambassadress!

ALL: The Nun! The Nun!

BOCKING: Children, behold God's saint!
So found I her, apparelled as for war,
Lost in her visions.

DERING: Listen! Mark her words!

RYSBY: Sobeit she speak to you.

A FRIAR: God bless our saint!
Earth never saw as fair.

FRIARS: God bless our saint!

DERING: Give ear to her.

BOCKING (*to ELIZABETH*): Speak, St. Elizabeth!

Hast thou no word of import for these souls
That wait on Heaven's high will?

ELIZABETH (*coming forward modestly*): Yea,
God so bids,
Else held I now my peace. What words be-
seem

A maiden's lips in so great hour as this?
But Heaven commands. I speak that God
ordains.

GOOLD: O hearken, hearken, Brothers!

RICH: Hark to her!

DERING: Her words are God's words!

ELIZABETH (*solemnly and slowly*): In the
awful night

God spoke, with words that struck across the
dark

Like thunderous lightning, blasting where they
fell,

Stripping proud Sin of its concealing grace,
And laying it all hideous and bare
Along the land—a scar to fright the world.
God spoke. My chastened soul stood still to
hear,
And quailed in hearing.

BOCKING: Who should hear God speak,
Nor falter? Oh, thou highest, nearest, best,
Avow thy mission. Speak to us deaf-mutes,
Who hear alone through thee.

FRIARS (kneeling): Declare it us!
Show us God's will!

RYSBY (*remorsefully*): Have mercy Thou,
good Lord!

(ELIZABETH suddenly draws her sword and
raises it high above her head, both arms
lifted.)

ELIZABETH: God's will is war! War agens
sin!

BOCKING (*hastily prompting her*): The king!

ELIZABETH (*excitedly*): Ay! War! War!
War 'gens sin and 'gens the king!

(As all are watching ELIZABETH, soldiers
noiselessly enter the hall from rear.)

DERING: War 'gens King Henry!

FRIARS: Henry is king no more.

BOCKING: Long live Queen Mary!

FRIARS (*more and more wildly*): Mary!
Mary! Queen!

We have no king, and Mary is our queen!

DERING (*low to ELIZABETH*): Continue. Fair begun!

RICH (*low to ELIZABETH*): Speak! Speak!

ELIZABETH (*bewildered*): What more?

I have forgot.

BOCKING (*aloud, prompting her*): Through thee the Spirit speaks.

ELIZABETH (*remembering*): Oh, hark! Through me God's spirit speaks! Hark! Hark! I am the unworthy mouthpiece of the Lord, But His these words I utter! Unto you His holy message! Arm! And in His name Dethrone that recreant monarch, falsely king, With her whose love unkings him! Arms! To arms!

(*She rushes with lifted sword into the crowd, then stops suddenly and turns to BOCKING, pointing to the soldiers, who during the above have gathered increasingly in the hall.*)

See, Father, who are these?

BOCKING (*with a terrible cry*): Betrayed! Betrayed!

(*Great commotion. More and more troops file in till they fill the hall.*)

OFFICIAL (*calling in loud voice above the tumult*): In names of Cranmer, Cromwell, Latimer,

The persons of these traitors now here found In very act of treason, I arrest—

Elizabeth, the so-styled Nun of Kent,
With Bocking, Dering, Rysby, Rich, and Goold.

(*A panic ensues. The friars flee on all sides while the guards seize and bind the five monks in spite of violent resistance. ELIZABETH stands bewildered. RYSBY turns to her as the guards approach.*)

RYSBY: Child! Child! fly! save thyself!

ELIZABETH(*dropping her sword and clasping her hands together*): What mean these cries—?

This frightful rout—? God save us, is this war?

RYSBY: Fly, fly, poor innocent!

GUARD (*seizing her*): Or innocent
Or guilty, she must hence to London.

ELIZABETH: Off!
Loose me! How dar'st thou touch me!

GUARD (*tightening his hold*): By the rood,
But yesterday I had not dared it!

ELIZABETH (*to BOCKING, who stands white and still, paralysed with the shock of the sudden defeat*): Help!

O Father, help me! Bid them let me go!
They know me not. Tell thou them who I am.

(BOCKING *pays no heed and is borne away unresisting*).

GUARD (*picking up her sword contemptuously*): Ay, ay, we know thee. Thou who yestere'en
Wert holiest saint, a traitor art the morn!

ELIZABETH: That I was yestere'en I am
this hour—

A saint—God's saint. Take your rude hands
away

Ere Heaven avenge the insult! Let me free,
Or I cry out to God to free me!—God!

God! Hear me! Help me! Dear God, save
thy saint!

God—God—save—

(She is overpowered and borne off.)

RYSBY: Dies iræ. All is done.
God hath avenged Himself.

GUARDS: To London! Hence!

(Curtain falls.)

ACT IV

SCENE I—(*London. The Star Chamber. CRANMER, LATIMER, and CROMWELL. THE NUN, FATHERS BOCKING, DERING, RYSBY, RICH, and GOOLD arraigned before them. Guards in the background.*)

CROMWELL: What boots it further parley with these knaves?

Deeds prove themselves, nor need expositors.

CRANMER: Truth, truth, good Cromwell.
Yet so foul a blot

Should not unevidenced besmirch these souls.
Were it but false!

LATIMER: Might all things false prove true!
Thou, Bocking, speak. Art thou unjustly
judged?

CRANMER: Speak thou for all. With these
thou standest here
Adjudged a traitor; with these art condemned.
An aught thou canst advance may temper justice
To some poor show of mercy, speak.

BOCKING: My Lords,
I speak nor for these others nor myself.
I own no kinship with these coward souls

That have confess their guilt for fear of it,
And myself stands acquitted to myself.

CRANMER: God judge thee, Friend, as lightly!

DERING (*furiously to BOCKING*): Now, by
God,

Thy pride, my fellow, needs a wrench or two,
Ere thy neck seemly fit the traitor's block!

Braver than shameful silence are stout words,
And we, by bold admission of our sin,

Less cowards than thyself. (*To Cranmer.*)

Why then, my Lord,
An it do please thee, we be traitors all,
Yet till thine axe untongue me, I 'll maintain
Ours was a mighty scheme, and that it failed,
Its chiefest fault.

RICH (*to BOCKING*): Curse thee, I say! 'T was
thou

Brought us to this!

GOOLD: Ay, curse him! But for him
The safety of the cloister held us still.
'T was his ambition wrecked us, choosing out
Our souls as steps to climb on. Living—dead—
I curse him!

RYSBY: Brother, peace! How may thy curse
Harm him or better thee? We trod one way,
Tempter and tempted. One mud soils the foot
Of him who beckons and of who pursues.

We all have sinned, nor he there more than all.
He sinned for strength, where we for weakness
fell

That truckled to his will. Our doom is just.

ELIZABETH (*who has listened in increasing amazement*): Just? Heavens! Who spoke? What crime is this of ours? What sin lies on our souls? Who dares condemn—

Who dares to stay us on our way?—My Lords, Sure some strange error hath you. Ye know not Our persons. I am St. Elizabeth, The Nun of Kent, chosen of Heaven's good grace

To free this stricken land from Henry's rule And crown our Mary queen;—and me, ye charge, And these my followers, with some grave sin Whereof we do reck nothing. Let us go, My Lords. Command the doors be opened us. The good cause suffers while ye hold us here.

RYSBY (*remonstrating*): My little lass! My little lass!

CROMWELL: Her words Condemn herself.

CRANMER (*pityingly*): So fair fanatic! And So innocently guilty before Heaven!

LATIMER: May that her innocence right her poor soul I' the Judgment hour. Here dies she with the rest.

ELIZABETH: I die? I die? Good God!— and these?—These too?

Wherefore our death?—Oh, Father Bocking,
speak!

What crime illusory have these confest?

Why art thou silent? Help me to fit words.

Dear Father, speak! How can I show to these
The sacrilege they purpose? Of myself,
How can I frame rebuke?

DERING: Peace, chattering fool!
He will not heed thee more.

ELIZABETH: This—this to me!
How dar'st thou thus address me? Whence
so swift

This graceless speech, this look contemptuous?
Wherefore forgot the honour due me? (*To*
BOCKING.) Thou!

Speak for me this once more. Tell these great
Lords—

These monks so metamorphosed—who I am!
Thy word they must believe!

BOCKING (*turning upon her*): Truce to thy
cries,

Thou miserable wench! No saint art thou,
Thou pride-stuffed puppet, vaunting thy glass
gems,

But a vain woman, tricked to fit the rôle—
A poor weak lass,—an empty, brainless thing
I chose among all for thy foolishness,
Thine ignorance, thy vainest vanity,
To fool this England with. And *thee*—and *thee*
I passed off on thy fellows as a saint!

ELIZABETH: Great God, are these ears mine
that hear?—this I
Of whom he speaks? Father—my Lord—my
Lord—

Dear Father Rysby! (*She appeals from one to the other.*) Wherefore turn away?
Why wilt not look at me?—thou, Father—
thou—

(*A pause. All move back from her. She recoils in sudden conviction.*)

Nay, is it so? Am I that thing he said?—
That awful thing?—a lie to mine own self?
A falsehood, flung out living on the world
And dressed in saintship?—O my God, my
God,

What am I? Who this I?—I am not I?—
I am some monster, stranger to myself
Than to the world that spurns me?—God
forgive!

My brain reels. (*She staggers.*)

CRANMER: Help there! Look! The
maiden falls.

ELIZABETH (*repulsing them*): Touch me not!
Take your cruel hands away!
Can ye give back the self he robbed me of?
God judge betwixt us twain! Mine ignor-
ance,

My folly, and my vainest vanity,
Be they confess; but how then has he sinned
Who thus undid me! God betwixt us judge!

RYSBY (*remorsefully*): God judge betwixt us.
Yea, may God so do.

CROMWELL (*to guards*): Bear hence.

(*The guards lead away the prisoners.*)
RICH (*to BOCKING*): Our blood be on thy
head!

GOOLD: Curse him!

BOCKING: The stakes are lost. But thus
much still is mine.

I palmed *thee* on thy fellows for a saint!

ELIZABETH (*as BOCKING is led off*): Nay, hold!
Hold only till I curse him, too,

Him I accounted as a second God
And followed on my knees! Hold, for my
curse!

CRANMER: Hush—hush!

ELIZABETH (*passionately*): Hush? Nay!
Who prayed him he abstain

When he first thought to kill my soul with
lies?

Who had compassion on my ignorance,
And cried him mercy for my foolishness?
None. None. Earth hath no pity for the weak.
Wiser who sins, than dares be sinned agens!

LATIMER (*to guards*): Bring her away. She
waxeth over loud.

ELIZABETH (*resisting*): Stand off! Where
bring ye me? The crime I did
Was done myself, none else. Oh, pity! spare!
Let me go free! Bring me to no foul gaol!

Am I not shamed enough? Let me go hence!
Let me go find one tender heart to die on—
One tender arm to shield me from disgrace!

LATIMER: The law thou hast transgressed
adjudges thee
The traitor's doom.

CRANMER: Alas! A very child!
ELIZABETH: Traitor? I? I? Now by our
stainless God,
My soul is lily-pure of ill intent!
How have I sinned? How should I know the
law?
For me was but one law—obedience—
And that I followed straightly.

LATIMER: To thy death.
Bear the lass hence.

ELIZABETH (*flinging herself upon the floor at his feet*): Oh, once more, pity! Hear!
Not life I ask. Life were not worth the prayer.
But give me only to see Cuthbert once,
To clear my soul before him ere I die!
We twain were lovers in the old dear days—
The sweet glad days. He will not hold at
fault
Though the whole world contemn me. He will
know
I sinned not in my soul albeit I die.
Let me but send for Cuthbert! For one hour—
One moment—speak him!

CROMWELL: Cuthbert? Nay! Not him!

CRANMER: Poor maid!

LATIMER (*softened*): There—take thy hands
from round my feet.

I may not grant thee this.

ELIZABETH (*despairingly*): Oh, dear my Lords,
Have mercy on me! Through earth's length
and breadth

There 's never one that loves me save but him.
Grant me my dying prayer! I have no gold;
How shall I bribe ye? Have ye hearts of
stone?

See. I will lay this hand upon the block,
That ye may cleave it, living, from mine arm—
This, too (*she extends both arms*), so you but only
bring him me

This single once before I come to die!

LATIMER: Rude truths are wholesomer than
kind deceits.

Elizabeth, art strong to suffer?

ELIZABETH (*joyfully, baring her arms*): Yea!
Oh, strike, strike quickly! I do need no hands
To hold his heart!

LATIMER: Elizabeth, 't was he
Denounced thee, with thy followers.

ELIZABETH (*dazed*): 'T was he—?

LATIMER: Ay; Cuthbert.

ELIZABETH (*after a pause, putting hand to
forehead*): Cuthbert?—Cuthbert?—It was
he

Denounced me?—For what crime?

LATIMER: High treason.

ELIZABETH (*after still longer pause*): Could He know my fate?

LATIMER: He knew the doom was death.

ELIZABETH (*wildly, to the guards, throwing up her arms*): Enough. Enough. Bear me away. I am

Already judged. I have already died.

[*The guards carry her off.*

SCENE II

(CRANMER, LATIMER, and CROMWELL. *Guards.*

There is a struggle at one of the doors, and CUTHBERT, followed by his mother, forces his way in.)

CUTHBERT: My Lords!

MISTRESS VANE: O gracious Lords, pray heed him not!

He is beside himself.

LATIMER (*to the other Lords*): Let us begone. Our business is done.

CUTHBERT: A hearing! Pray!

CRANMER: Ay, when the dead speak.

CUTHBERT: Hear me!

LATIMER: Good my Lords, Will it please you go?

CUTHBERT (*desperately, placing himself in their way*): My Lords, if you be good, It shall please you stay and hearken. I am come To yield me up to justice, in the stead

Of one Elizabeth, the Nun of Kent,
Whom ye here hold for treason.

MISTRESS VANE (*wringing her hands*): He
is mad!

I do entreat you, hear him not!

LATIMER (*coldly*): The law
Demands Elizabeth of Kent—not thee.

CUTHBERT: Guilty of over loyalty am I
As shē of too great innocence. Take me,
And set her free. More traitor I to her
Than e'er she to the king.

MISTRESS VANE: My Lords—my Lords—
He is mine only son!

LATIMER: We do waste breath.
Justice retains its own.

CUTHBERT: Hold me for her—
Were not that justice? She is innocent
Of will. Let me atone her guilty deed.
So is the law avenged, and she yet lives!

CRANMER: My son, thy prayers are idle.
(*To the others.*) Let us hence.

CUTHBERT: My Lords, I ask but justice—
naught beside.
I sue you for no favour. Take my life
In ransom for her life. The sin she sinned
Unwittingly, let my death expiate
In what extremity of torturous shame
Men can devise. Let her but live!

CROMWELL: Peace. Peace.

CUTHBERT: Hear me!

LATIMER: No more. Her sentence hath
been read.

Elizabeth, the Nun of Kent, accused
Of treason, is found guilty and condemned.

(*Exeunt Lords.*)

CRANMER (*passing out*): May Heaven now
comfort thee, and her.

(*Exit.*)

SCENE III

(CUTHBERT and MISTRESS VANE.)

CUTHBERT: She dies!
She dies! O justice, what abhorrent crime
Of mercilessness in thy name condoned!
Blind, blind thy judgments! False thy scales
that weigh
Bare deeds, unbalanced by the soul's intent!
She dies for innocency—dies for lack
Of knowing it was guilt that touched her—dies
For others' sin, although to me denied
The right to die for hers!

MISTRESS VANE: Would God thou hadst
But closed thy lips!—but held thy peace!

CUTHBERT (*fiercely*): Be still!
Wake not the struggle in my maddened soul!
'Twixt her and honour was there choice? Ah,
God!

MISTRESS VANE (*slowly, after a pause*): Cuth-
bert, she shall not die!

CUTHBERT: Not die?

MISTRESS VANE (*putting finger to lips*):

Speak soft!

CUTHBERT (*coming closer*): Speak quick!

What hath thy woman-wit devised?

Canst save her? Oh, speak quick! Show thou it me.

Then shall I know there is a God in Heaven!

MISTRESS VANE: Shame thee, blasphemer!

Is a maiden worth

Thy faith in God? Hark. This my thought—to gain

Speech with the Lord Lieutenant of the Tower.

CUTHBERT: Sir Frederick? How may he help our strait?

MISTRESS VANE: Long days ago thy father—blest his soul!—

Did him brave service in a heavy hour

Should now bear timely fruit, if gratitude

Be not a seedless flower in his breast.

I will but beg our access to her room.

So small a mercy should not irk him grant;—

Nay rather, it should please him that he come

So light off in our weighing of accounts.

CUTHBERT: And how bring Beth away?

MISTRESS VANE: Her person is One height with mine. If in the dusk thou come—

I being within and way made clear for thee—

Who, in the uncertain light, shall see to mark

If she or I, wearing this cloak of mine

With hood drawn close, return again with thee?
And for the rest—I 'll e'en contrive a way
To follow.

CUTHBERT (*falling on his knees*): Now, our
God be gracious! Look!
Thy thought is life! Mother, I pray again!
(*Curtain falls.*)

ACT V

(SCENE I—*A prison cell. ELIZABETH, in peasant's dress, seated with folded hands and bent head, oblivious of surroundings. A ray of the setting sun, slanting through one of the barred windows, is creeping toward her along the floor. A young woman, the prison attendant, is seated at some distance at another window, busy with needlework and humming softly to herself. The approaching ray at last catches ELIZABETH's eye.*)

ELIZABETH: O lovely light! Dost thou not
fear to soil

So fair a foot, treading a prison floor?

Here all is sin and dolour; yet thou dar'st,
Thou holy thing, to chase the dark away?

Thou dear light, linger! Must thou soon be
gone?

This day is all I have. To-night I die.

Make my time longer, thou compassionate
light!

Borrow a moment from the night that comes,
To add it to this day that is my all.

Keep back night's shadows. Lay thy silver hand

Across the stars, and bar them from their places.

(*Rises and goes to the window.*)

Stand off, thou horrid night! Along the west
The scarlet palpitates for fear of thee.

The giant clouds, marshalled as sentinels
Around day's open gates, have sighted thee
And broken from their post, and flee dis-
mayed.

The whole earth is aghast at thee, O night.

And I? Can I endure thee? I have sinned,
And sin dreads shadows. And to-night I die,
And death is uttermost of darkness. Night,
Or sin, or death—which is most terrible?

(*She moves slowly away from the window,
and stands awhile with clasped hands;
then reseats herself, and falls again into
a deep reverie.*)

SCENE II

(*The same. Enter MISTRESS VANE, closely cloaked.*

ATTENDANT springs up.)

ATTENDANT: Who art thou?—No one enters
here.

MISTRESS VANE (*beckoning her aside*):
Whist! Whist!

Thy gallant waits without the postern door.

ATTENDANT: My Robin? Hola!

(*She starts eagerly off, then bethinks her-
self and returns.*)

Name thee. Who art thou?
Who charged thee with thine errand?

MISTRESS VANE (*showing written paper*):
Go in peace.

See. This my passport; this (*giving riband*)
thy Robin's sign.

ATTENDANT (*glancing at paper*): The Lord
Lieutenant's seal! 'T is well.—Hi! Hi!
The broidered band! (*Going, pauses again.*)
How pass the Keeper?

MISTRESS VANE: Pish!
He 'll stay thee not. A new-brewed ale he had
In gift to sup on. Thou 'lt come safely through.
Leave thou the latch unset, that my son mount
To fetch me forth. Anon, when we twain pass,
My son and I, returning, slip within,
And so take up thy task again

ATTENDANT: Ay. Ay.
Wilt guard her close?

MISTRESS VANE: Closer than thou. Fear
naught.

May'st bide thy pleasure.

ATTENDANT (*joyously*): Look thou weary not!
(*Exit.*)

SCENE III

(ELIZABETH and MISTRESS VANE.)

MISTRESS VANE (*muttering*): Thy Robin
tend thee well. The time is ours!

(*Approaches the window.*)

Will yon slow sun ne'er make an end of day?

(She seats herself far off from ELIZABETH by the window, whence she keeps anxious watch. ELIZABETH, lost in reverie, has paid no heed to the dialogue, nor to the change of companion.)

ELIZABETH *(rousing after a pause):* Is 't night?

MISTRESS VANE *(keeping her face averted):*
'T is nigh on vespers.

ELIZABETH: Tell thy beads.
It may be God will hear thee for me too.

I am afraid to pray. I wronged God so
I fear the angels would rise up in wrath
And beat my prayers back, did I kneel to pray.

MISTRESS VANE: Nay, God hears every
prayer. *(Aside.)* The pink pales fast.
The night adjusts her robes.

ELIZABETH: Nay, not all prayers,
Else were there many we would fain unpray.
And there was one—Oh, years agone it was—
That He did never hear. Dear Lord, it ran,
Make us twain one, and make Beth very good.
Yet I, who prayed for goodness, alas! I
Have sinned beyond all others. I, who prayed
I might be Cuthbert's wife, by Cuthbert's self
Am given to death. Oh, that was sorry prayer
That had such sorry answer. And to-night
I pray no more, my prayers go so awry;
And yet my soul is heavy with desires

That crowd for utterance. Pray thou for me.
Pray fast; pray long; for I am nigh to death,
And God is very just.

MISTRESS VANE: God is all love.

(*Aside*):

Now comes the slow-stepped dusk on languid
feet!

ELIZABETH: I do need mercy. I have sinned
a sin

Exceeding any other. Hast thou heard?
I was so ignorant, so monstrous vain,
I did believe them when they called me saint.
Yea. Yea. So vain. As were *I* shaped thereto!
It shames me to remember. Yea, so vain,
I thought myself elect of God to speak
His wrath against the king. I might have
known

That had God spoken, the whole world had
heard—

Not only we in Canterbury town.

Yea, I have sinned; have sinned; and what
hell holds

Deeper damnation than sin's consciousness?

MISTRESS VANE: Thy thoughts turn too
far inward. Woo them back
To healthier daylight.

ELIZABETH: Who is near to death
Consorts with shadows, and explores the dark
To try if his poor faith have power to pierce
To a beyond. What recks he more of sun,

Or midday skies, or small sweet earthly things,
On whose stunned sense, vast, vague, and
terrible,
Beat the far soundings of eternity,
Wave after wave?

MISTRESS VANE (*to herself*): Yon shines
night's signet star,
Sealing day dead!

ELIZABETH: Oh, tell me, what is death?
Is it all darkness, silence, and a pang?
The dark hath ever led my soul in clogs,
And from a child I am afraid of pain.
A finger's touch jars every quickening nerve.
And silence—Ah, the weirdest 't is of all.
One hears the heart beat in it like a voice
Entombed, struggling to make its terrors reach
Out to the living.

MISTRESS VANE (*at the window*): Fast the
dear night drops
Her tender shadows! Fast the world grows dim!

ELIZABETH: Oh, tell me, what is death?
I am afraid.

My warm young flesh shudders at thought of it.
How can I die?—how can I cease to be?
Although all others die, can I?—Nay, death
Comes only to the weary or the old,
Not to the young!—not to the bounding veins,
Instinct with life!—oh, not to me, to me!

MISTRESS VANE (*absently*): All men needs
die in time.

ELIZABETH (*quickly, turning toward her*):

Yea, yea, in time.

But I die out of time, before my heart
Hath ripened to its possibilities.
I am but a beginning—but a sketch
Blurred in designing—but a might-have-been
Spoiled for eternity. I die with all
My future like a dead bud in my hand.
To what good have I lived? This tiny span
Of years, what hath it brought me? Alas, what!
To be thrust forth, unshaven and undone,
From sin, because of sin, and in my sin,
To meet a sinless God!

MISTRESS VANE (*springing up excitedly*):

Hark! Hark! At last

He comes!

ELIZABETH (*alarmed*): Who seeks me here?

Who climbs my stair?

Prithee, bar close the door!

MISTRESS VANE: Hast thou forgot
So soon his step?—so soon forgotten me?

(*She throws off the concealing cloak and hood.*)

ELIZABETH (*recognising her*): Thou, Mistress
Vane! Thou here! and Cuthbert—Ah!
Let him not in!

MISTRESS VANE (*moving toward door*): Cuth-
bert!

ELIZABETH (*detaining her*): Nay. Never
more.

Who was my lover is become my judge.
My sin stands, flame-like, 'twixt my heart and his.
MISTRESS VANE (*calling*): Cuthbert! Come
quickly! quickly!

SCENE IV

(*The same. CUTHBERT hurries in. ELIZABETH gives a low heartbroken cry. They stand looking at each other.*)

MISTRESS VANE: Haste! Oh, haste!
A life hangs in the balance of this hour!
Follow ye me. I go to watch the way.

(*Exit.*)

SCENE V

(*ELIZABETH and CUTHBERT. He advances, beckoning with outstretched arms.*)

CUTHBERT: Come! Come!

ELIZABETH (*retreating*): Nay, whither?

CUTHBERT (*joyously*): Forth with me—to life!

ELIZABETH (*gravely*): I may but forth to death.

CUTHBERT: Life hath tricked death!
Life claims thee! Come, oh, come! Veil thee
in this.

(*He draws her to him and folds MISTRESS VANE's cloak about her.*)

Love calls, and thou art free!

ELIZABETH (*throwing off cloak*): How am I free,
Whom sin holds fettered?

CUTHBERT (*trying to force her forward*): O my God! the hour wanes fast, each beat a drop of thy heart's blood!

ELIZABETH (*holding back*): Would it might bleed to death here 'neath thine arm. So were it sweet to die.

CUTHBERT: So sweeter life, We two aye soul to soul, and free! Oh, haste! Delay is death!

ELIZABETH: I scarce may credit it. Am I yet dear to thee—I who so sinned?

CUTHBERT: Dearer than all things earthly or divine.

Why wilt thou torture me? Come with me! Come!

ELIZABETH: Hast thou forgot thou gavest me to die?—Forgot I here await sin's recompense?

CUTHBERT: Mock me not thus! ELIZABETH: I mock not. Who dares mock Upon the threshold of death's gravity?

I may not go with thee.

CUTHBERT (*attempting to seize her in his arms*): Thou shalt go, Beth, Now Heaven itself hath lent us furtherance. Safety awaits thee yonder.

ELIZABETH (*springing from him to the window*): Back! One step, And hence I summon aid!

CUTHBERT: Beth—Beth—not thus
Avenge thyself! Give not thy life to prove
Me unforgiven!

ELIZABETH (*very gently*): Dear, I love thee
so,
To gainsay wish of thine itself is death.
Oh, tempt me not! Life in thine arms were
Heaven.

Yet death wins closer, cleansing me from sin.

CUTHBERT: Thou hast not sinned, Beth!
God knows—oh, God knows
Thou art unjustly judged, unjustly doomed.
The priests misled thee; theirs alone the sin.
'T is for their sin thou diest.

ELIZABETH (*still more gently*): Dear my love,
Accuse not those who wronged me. I have
wronged
A country, where they wronged but me. Sin
lies
Between us; Heaven will fair apportion it;
But me my soul convicts. 'T is just I die.
'T is of God's goodness—of His pitying grace
He sent thee here to bless this crowning hour
With the dear benediction of thy love.
Urge me no more. Not e'en for that love's sake
May I go hence. Thus, dying, I undo
My sin. Keep thou my memory as one
Who living was unworthy, but who, dead,
Grew to thy height, and merited thy love.

CUTHBERT: Beth!

ELIZABETH (*coming to him*): Beth again at last—nor saint, nor nun;
Only thy little Beth who loves thee so,
Come back to rest this last once on thy heart.

(CUTHBERT *folds her to him in agony. Outside there is the tramp of approaching feet and the sound of slow drums.*)

SCENE VI

(*The same. Enter MISTRESS VANE wildly, followed by guards.*)

MISTRESS VANE: O God, it is too late! They come! They come!

CUTHBERT: The guards!

ELIZABETH (*disengaging herself from him*): Mine hour hath come; the one great hour
That rounds each life, bearing the trembling soul
Back to its birthplace, naked and alone,
Save for its sins. (*Kneels.*) O God, I did fear
death,
Yet fear not Thee, so hath love vanquished fear.
I go to Thee as goes a child to rest,
Sure of Thy mercy.

(*The guards surround her. Behind open doors stand others guarding the five monks. Muffled drums beat continuously.*)

CUTHBERT (*fiercely to the guards*): God's curse fall on you!
Ye bring a saint to shame!

ELIZABETH: Alas! Not so.
They bring a traitor to the traitor's end
And an impostor to the world's disdain.
They do but justice. Mother, fare thee well.
Cuthbert—my love—my love—(*She is led away.*)

CUTHBERT (*passionately*): I die with thee!
One fate shall yet be ours! Oh, let me hence!

(*He rushes madly after her, but is repulsed
by the guards.*)

Let me die with her—I, the guiltier!
Have not I murdered her for Henry's sake?
Shall murderers go free?

(*The guards thrust him back and close the
doors. The slow drums beat without, the
sounds gradually receding.*)

CUTHBERT (*wildly*): I may not die?
Mercy stops short of justice? I live on—
I, who have given her lovely soul to death—
Nor pay the price with mine own piteous life?
Now God, forgive!

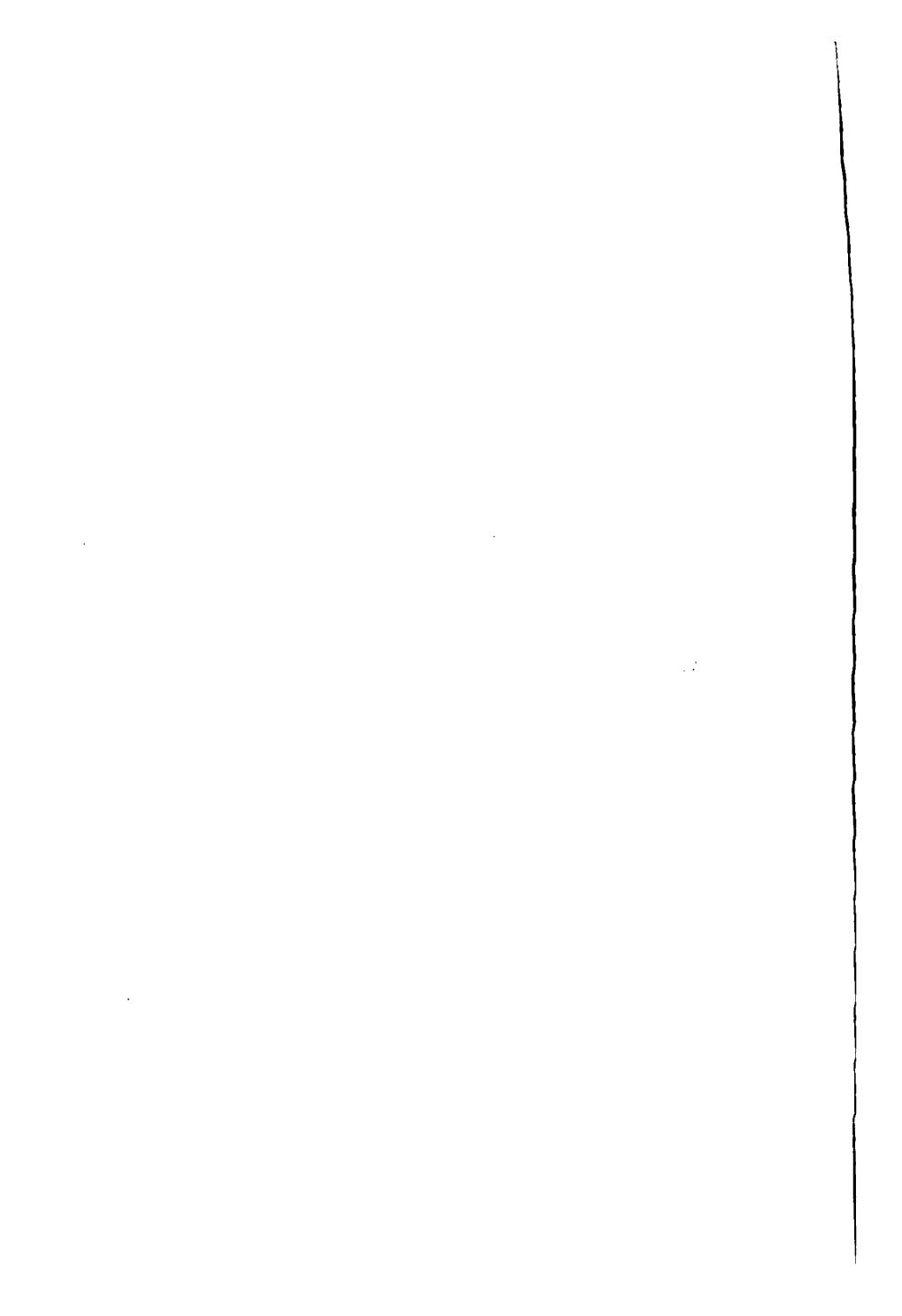
(*He draws a dagger. His mother leaps to
wrest it from him.*)

MISTRESS VANE: Cuthbert!—Son!—Son!—

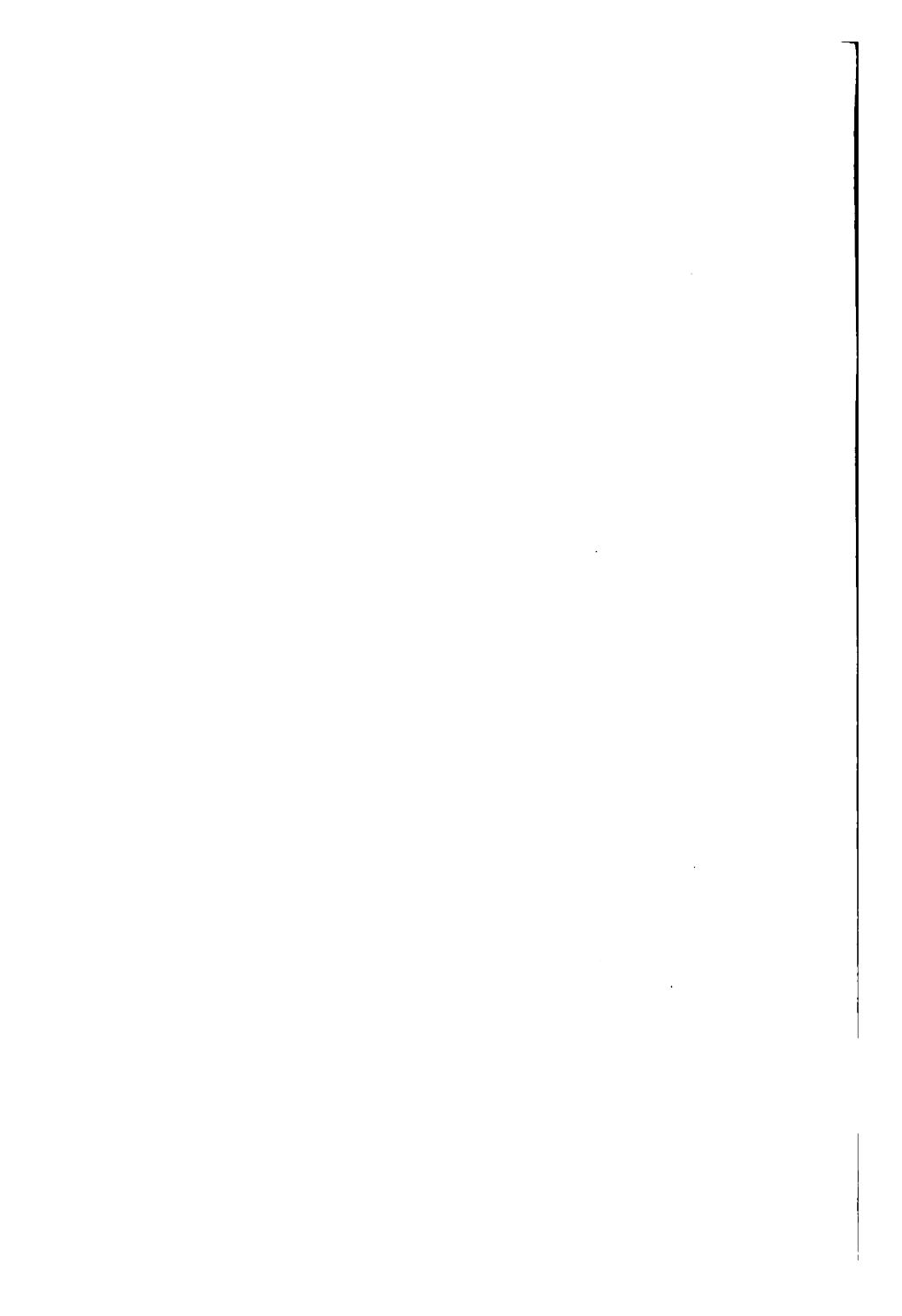
CUTHBERT: Forgive!

(*He stabs himself to the heart and falls dead.
The drums beat faintly in the distance.*)

(*Curtain falls.*)



Miscellaneous Poems



TO

ELINOR COMSTOCK



IN MY WINDOW-SEAT

I AM sitting in my window-seat,
And all the world is still;
Only the shadows 'neath my feet
Are creeping up the hill,
And the shadows above are stooping down
As if to lay o'er the sleeping town
The folded mantle, soft and brown,
They have dropped to my window-sill.

More dim, more dense the twilight grows;
A silence falls on earth
As if it waited for the throes
Of some immortal birth.
The stars throb out with fitful light,
Like a golden pulse in the veins of night,
And across the heavens, thin and white,
Stretches the silver girth.

Then out upon the quivering dark—
The palpitating sky—
Athwart the gloom that seems to hark
A decree that bids it die,

Dropped from a hand beyond our sight
There falls the glittering long moonlight,
Like a sword down-flashing through the night
That it severs in passing by.

And as if wakened at the touch
To tremulous delight,
Yet tinged with earthliness overmuch,
Come the voices of the night,
Now sad as notes of mortals are,
Now sweet, mysterious, and far
As from seraphs poised on a distant star,
But winged for nearer flight.

My soul, borne upward with the sweep
Of the solemn exultant lay,
Borne on by the music grave and deep
Is lost in the pathless grey.
Around me are living thoughts astir.
Above Truths interlace and blur.
Beneath lie shadows of things that were,
And dreams dreamed through by day.

And as I watch, lo, over all,
O'er sea, and hill, and wood,
A wondrous presence seems to fall
Out of the clouds that brood—
Something immeasurably grand,
As if the shadow of God's hand
An instant lay across the land,
And near us angels stood.

In My Window-Seat

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And a holy murmur fills the air,
 A strange delicious thrill,
As if men's hearts awoke in prayer
 To listen to God's will,
And, listening, heard a summons sweet
 Beyond compare, and ceased to beat.—
And I sit alone in my window-seat,
 And the world is very still.

THE SUNLIGHT

THE Sunlight, the Sunlight,
 It cometh apace!
It breaks through the dun light
 Of night-shadowed space!
It comes with a glimmer,
A sparkle and shimmer.
The moon showeth dimmer,
 The planets give place!

It bendeth, it rendeth
 Night's prisoning bars!
Exultant out-sendeth
 Its voiceless hurrahs!
O'er bulwarks and bowers
It scatters bright showers,
Like luminous flowers
 Grown out of the stars.

O souls that lie sleeping
 In doubt and in n ght,
Wake, wake from your weeping!
 Day comes, in despite
Of cavil or grieving.
Man's best of believing,
Is but the receiving
 Of Heavenly Light.

TO A ROSEBUD

O LITTLE timid rose,
That if the zephyr blows
Tremblest with fear,
O dainty tender one,
That blushest if the sun
Glances anear.

Yet fragile as thou art,
The secret of thy heart
Who thinks to win?
Closer than bars of gold
Thy silken petals hold
The prize within.

And winds in vain may blow,
And fiercest sunbeams glow
Above thy head;
For when thy sweet heart lies
Open to eager eyes,—
Lo, thou art dead!

PAIN

I AM a Mystery that walks the earth
Since man began to be.
Sorrow and sin stood sponsors at my birth,
And terror christened me.

More pitiless than Death, who gathereth
His victims day by day,
I doom man daily to desire Death,
And still forbear to slay.

More merciless than Time, I leave man youth,
And suck life's sweetness out.
More cruel than despair, I show man truth,
And leave him strength to doubt.

I bind the freest in my subtle band.
I blanch the boldest cheek.
I hold the hearts of poets in my hand,
And wring them ere they speak.

I walk in darkness over souls that bleed.
I shape each as I go
To something different. I sow the seed
Whence grapes or thistles grow.

No two that dream me, dream the self-same
face.

No two name me alike.
A horror without form I fill all space.
Across all time I strike.

Look how man cringes to mine unseen rod!
Kings own my sovereignty.
Though seers but prove me as they prove a God,
Yet none denieth me.

I come! I come! Life's monster Mystery,
I come, to bless or damn.
Kneel, kneel, vain soul! Helpless, acknowledge
me!
Thou *feelest* that *I am!*

DAY-DREAMS

Oh, sweet are the dreams that darkness brings—
The fragrant roses that slumber fl ngs
 Into the garden of night;
But sweeter far are the dreams that Day
Drops all along life's woful way,
As the Ivory Gates behind him sway
 On their hinges of dappled light.

Oh, beautiful dreams, that spring like flowers
Out of the seeds of life's dark hours,
 Watered with tears of pain;—
Lilies that bloom mid sterile sands,
Too frail to transplant to happier lands,
Too fair to gather in mortal hands,
 Too dear to lose again.

Oh, beautiful, beautiful, waking dreams,
That flow like forest-hidden streams
 By the foot-worn paths of Day;
Streams that go singing for Love's own sake;
Streams that their sweetest music make
Out of the very stones that break
 The smoothness of their way.

Oh, exquisite dreams, that softly show
Through the grey-spun veil of earthly woe,
 Like stars in wintry skies,
Too far to make our own, so near
They tempt our grasp, laid, large and clear,
On Night's dark forehead, sphere on sphere—
 Jewels from Paradise.

O stars that vanish, O flowers that fade,
Streams that are lost in the woodland shade,
 Bubbles that break with a kiss,—
O dreams that from the hidden roots
Of buried sorrows, like green shoots
Grow toward the light, yet bear no fruits,
 Are ye less fair for this?

What though ye be naught but mist-made
 dreams?
Richer our lives e'en for fugitive gleams
 Of hopes that may ne'er be ours!
Then pray for a dreamless sleep who will—
For a slumber no vis ons have power to thrill—
But oh, thank Heaven that gives us still,
 The dreams of our waking hours.

LOVE SONG

As when the day is done
The clouds troop one by one
 Toward the sun,
So turn my thoughts to thee
For aye, unceasingly,
 Where'er thou art;
 Day of my heart!

As grows toward the light
The pale shoot hid from sight
 In earth's deep night,
So upward to its goal,
Swift stretches out my soul
 To where thou art,
 Light of my heart!

As brooks merge in the bay,
As April bursts to May,
 Morn swells to day,
So am I lost in thee,
So must thou ever be
 Of me a part,
 Heart of my heart!

IN THE BEAUTIFUL

BE still. Be still. Do not speak.
The charm of the hour,
Fallen soft as a tear on a cheek,
Holds me dumb in its power.

Be still, oh, be still! Speech were pain
In a moment like this.
Call me not earthward again,
E'en with a kiss.

Leave me alone with my heart,
To tremble and thrill.
Oh, leave me before the tears start.
Or stay—and be still!

THE MILKY WAY

EVENING has come; and across the skies—
Out through the darkness that, quivering, dies—

Beautiful, broad, and white,
Fashioned of many a silver ray
Stolen out of the ruins of Day,
Grows the pale bridge of the Milky Way,
Built by the architect Night.

Dim with shadows, and bright with stars,
Hung like gold lights on invisible bars

Stirred by the wind's spent breath,
Rising on cloud-shapen pillars of grey,
Perfect it stands, like a tangible way
Binding to-morrow with yesterday,
Reaching to Life from Death.

Dark show the heavens on either side;
Soft flows the blue in a waveless tide
Under the silver arch;
Never a footstep is heard below,
Echoing earthward, as measured and slow,
Over the bridge the still hours go
Bound on their trackless march.

Is it a pathway leading to Heaven
Over Earth's sin-clouds, rent and riven
 With its supernal light,
Crossed by the souls of the loved who have flown
Stilly away from our arms, and alone
Up to the beautiful, great, white Throne
 Pass in the hush of night?

Is it the road that our wild dreams walk,
Far beyond reach of our waking talk,
 Out to the vague and grand—
Far beyond Fancy's uttermost range,
Out to the Dream-world of marvel and change,
Out to the mystic, unreal and strange—
 Out to the Wonderland?

Is it the way that the angels take
When they come down by night to wake
 Over the slumbering Earth?
Is it the way the faint stars go back,
Driven by insolent Day from his track
Into the distant mysterious Black
 Where their bright souls had birth?

What may it be? Who may certainly say?
Over the shadowy Milky Way
 No human foot hath trod.
Æons have passed; but unsullied and white,
Still it stands, fair as a rainbow of night,
Held like a promise above our dark sight,
 Guiding our thoughts to God.

THE STORM-KING

STAND back! Stand back
From my giant track!
Sweep the grey dust from the way!
See the pale grass bend!
See the great trees rend!
Hurrah! I am Lord of the day!
I am Master and King
Over everything—
I am Monarch, and Earth must obey!

Weave me a gown
Of yon cloud's black frown,
Which shall keep me warm as I go.
Pluck me a whip
From the spars of yon ship
And a staff from that forest below,
And this tall church-spire
Is the tip I desire
For the arrow I set in my bow.

I am King! I am King!
The whole world shall ring
My mad coronation bell!
Cities are shaking.
Men's hearts are quaking,

As they quake before Azrael.
I am coming! I come!
Beat, beat the drum!
Let the echoes my advent tell!

Hurrah, oh, hurrah!
Beneath moon and star
How will I revel at night!
I will build me a fire
Where hills stand higher,
And scream and exult in its light,
And write out my name,
In red letters of flame,
In cowering mortals' sight.

I hiss and I mutter,
And none knows if I utter
Or blessing, or curse, or prayer.
None knows what I speak;
Though I storm and I shriek,
None interprets the message I bear.
I rave and I rage,
And Earth's wisest sage
Hears no more than the brute in his lair!

I am King! I am King!
And to me one thing
Is beggar, or courtier, or pope.
I thread into rags
The proudest of flags,

The Storm-King

Or the end of the hangman's rope.
I scoff in lords' faces.
I jeer in high places.
I shout on the graveyard's slope.

Oh, delight! Oh, joy!
The world is my toy!
Hurrah! I am Lord of the day!
I rule all alone
On my self-raised throne,
And none may dispute my sway!
Then stand back! Stand back!
Sweep the dust from my track!
I am Monarch, and Earth must obey!

THE DANCE

LET the music play!

I would dance alway—

Dance till the dawn of the bright young day!
Wild notes are sounding—swift lights are glanc-
ing,

And I—I am mad with the rapture of dancing—
Mad with a breathless delight.

With thine arm to enfold me,

Thy strong hand to hold me,

I could dance through an endless night.

Doth the music play?

Or is it—oh, say—

But the sound of thy voice that I hear for alway?

Is it thy smile or the sweet lights glancing?

Is it thy presence or only the dancing

Makes the whole world so glad?

Love I—ah me!—

Or the dance, or thee?

Am I mad? Am I mad? Am I mad?

Bid the music play!

Let us dance alway—

Through all life—through all time—dance for-
ever and aye!

Such wild notes are sounding! Such bright
lights are glancing!
And I—I am mad with the madness of dancing—
Of dancing?—or dancing with thee?
 Let thy heart's love enfold me!
 Thy heart's strength uphold me!
Let us dance till earth ceases to be!

THE BEGGAR

ALL day, all the day, in the dust, in the heat,
With maddening brain and with staggering feet,
I stand on Life's highway, and beg my soul's
meat.

All day, all the day, in the cold, in the rain,
Through days that are vapid and timeless with
pain,
I stretch out my hand to the rich—and in vain.

Oh, my soul is a-hungered—my soul is athirst!
It cries out to mortals as one God-accurst,
Abandoned of Heaven, when life is at worst.

Say, say, is there any 'neath heaven's blue sky
So beggared of faith, hope, and courage as I?
Give, give, oh, my brothers! Give, give, or I die!

Shall I famish and faint in the midst of Life's
mart,
And ye who seem pitiful, spare not a part
Of your souls' garnered wealth for one needy
poor heart?

In vain! Ye fling alms to the rags that ye meet;
But souls that lie naked and starved at your feet;
These cry out unheard, and must die on the
street.

THE FOG

It lies dim and cold on the face of the mould,
Like a smile on the lips of the dead.
As chill and as white, as dense and as light
As the winding-sheet laid in the still of the night
Over the funeral bed.

No pulse seems to throb, no voice dares to sob
Beneath the grey calm of the cloud.
A hush holds the air with pale bands of despair,
Too close to be pierced by a curse or a prayer—
The hush of a soul in its shroud.

No stars in the sky; no lights low or high;
No laughter; no weeping; no breath;
No murmur, no sound in the whole world around,
But a silence that lies blank and chill on the
ground,
Like the visible presence of Death.

No murmur. No sound. Only white on the
ground
There creeps the thin silence along—
Creeps near and more near,—oh, so dim! oh, so
drear!
Till I shiver, as one who has stood by a bier,
And the words die away in my song.

ONE SILENT BIRD AMID A THOUSAND SINGING

One silent bird amid a thousand singing,
One muffled bell amid a thousand ringing,—
 On the earth or in the air
 Doth it make silence anywhere?

One lagging foot amid a thousand fleeting,
One sinking heart amid a thousand beating,
 Save the God who lists for prayer,
 Doth there any heed or care?

IN THE HOSPITAL

I

GRIMED with misery, want, and sin,
From a drunken brawl they brought him in,

While tearless-eyed around his bed,
They whispered coldly: "He is dead,"

And looked askance as they went past,
And said: "Best so. He has sinned his last."

But the surgeon sighed: "Alas! Not so.
A flicker of life is yet aglow."

And day and night beside the cot,
He stayed his step, desisting not;

By night, by day, with travail sore,
Fought for the life so nearly o'er—

The worthless life so nearly told,
And the man returned to his ways of old—

Went back unchanged to his old, sad ways,
And sinned and sinned to the end of his days.

And the surgeon wrote in his private book:
“Sin, sorrow, wrong, where'er I look.

“I have saved a hideous life. And why?
That a man curse God again, and die.”

II

The mother smiled through her wretchedness,
For the new-born babe lay motionless.

The nurses looked at her ringless hand.
“‘T is well,” they said. “We understand.”

But the surgeon sighed: “Alas! Not so.
Life’s feeble current yet may flow.”

And day and night the cot beside,
He tireless watched, naught left untried,

And wrestling close and long with Death,
He brought again the faltering breath,

To give the poor unwelcome life
Back to the mother who was not wife,

Who took with loathing and with shame
The babe that had nor place nor name.

And the surgeon wrote in his private book:
“Sin, sorrow, wrong, where'er I look.

“I have saved a needless life. And why?
That a babe risk Heaven before it die.”

III

With pitying hands and gentle feet,
They bore a child in from the street,

Mangled and bruised in every limb,
With brow snow-cold and blue eyes dim.

And they kissed the hair on his golden head,
And sobbed: "Thank God, the child is dead."

But the surgeon sighed: "Alas! Not so.
Life lingers still, though ebbing slow."

And day and night, beside the cot,
No means unused, no skill forgot,

Striving as if with strength of ten,
He won the broken life agen

Back from the brink of Death's calm river,
To struggle, sicken, suffer forever—

Back from the shores where sleep the dead,
To toss long years on a terrible bed.

And the surgeon wrote in his private book:
"Sin, sorrow, wrong, where'er I look.

"I have saved a sorrowful life. And why?
That a child taste hell ere allowed to die."

And the surgeon closed his book, and said:
"Three live by me who best were dead."

BEYOND THE HOSPITAL

THE surgeon's work was done. He lay
Upon his death-bed, old and grey,

Outspent with giving to mankind
His best of heart and hand and mind.

And he crossed his arms above his breast,
"Come, Death," he said, "I long for rest."

"God judge me lightly. What I could,
I strove for; yet wrought harm for good."

Then swiftly, all of space was riven
To where the angels stood in Heaven.

And he heard one say: "A wise man dies,
Shall I go down and close his eyes?"

"Not yet," they said. "'T is in his book:
'Sin, sorrow, wrong, where'er I look.'

"Is he fit for Heaven who needs learn first,
That good may underlie life's worst?—

"Who needs to look beyond the event
To comprehend life's full intent?"

Then through the room was a sound of wings,
Like a breath across æolian strings.

And the angels stood around his bed.
"Unlearn Earth's falsehoods, friend," they said.

And straightway, lo, his quickened gaze,
Saw through the world and its inmost ways,

To where one grovelled steeped in sin,
Grown to the very beasts akin.

"Ah," cried the surgeon, "I am cause
Yon wretch still lives to break God's laws."

"Hold!" said the angels. "Canst thou tell
What sin consigns his soul to hell?

"Or doubtst thou but some late grace
May find, e'en him, in Heaven a place?

"Pity and help; but dare not say
Life should be shortened by a day;

"For as men are turned by a warning light,
So yon stray soul points wanderers right."

The shadow left the surgeon's brow
As lifts the mist from a breeze-swept bough;

And he bent his wondering eyes away
To where a cradled infant lay,

While the mother beat her breast for shame
That the babe must lifelong bear her blame.

“Ah, but for me,” the surgeon cried,
“This guiltless babe had guiltless died.”

But the angels smiled on the sleeping face.
“Greater than ours its granted grace,

“For these frail hands,” they said, “hold back
The mother’s soul from utter wrack.

“Pity and help. But dare not say
Life should be shortened by a day;

“For sweeter rest that is wage of toil:
And purer purity held through soil.”

There dawned a light in the surgeon’s eyes
As if day broke through midnight skies;

And his gaze sought out a darkened spot
Where a child tossed, moaning, on his cot,

Martyred in every shuddering vein,
Through noons and nights all one with pain.

The surgeon groaned. “Ah, but for me
The child were spared this agony!”

“Soft,” said the angels. “What dost know
Of the beauty wrought on earth through woe?

"Pity and help. But dare not say
'T were better hasten death a day:

"For as blossoms spring on sunless knolls,
Some graces bloom but in tortured souls.

"And a hundred hearts, beside that one,
Have learned the joy of duties done;

"Have learned unselfishness, patience, care,
Beside that pain that none may share.

"And the sufferer—Heaven deserts these not;
God's arm is round him. Envy his lot."

The surgeon lifted his dying eyes,
And saw straight through to paradise.

"Amen!" he breathed. "God stoops to the weak,
The strong are they must farthest seek.

"For every life this earth hath use,
Despite sin, sorrow, wrong, abuse!

"I thank Thee, Father, that those three
For whom I wrought, yet live by me."

Then through the room was a sudden sense
Of something exquisite passing thence,

Something immortally fine and rare
That trembled, flame-like, on the air,

Trembled and passed, and all around
Was not a motion, nor a sound.

And in the silence, old and grey
And marble-still, the surgeon lay.

But his lips were wreathed in supreme content.
He knew, at last what Life had meant.

A SONG OF THE SUNRISE.

THE night breaks. The light shakes
Down from the sky.
The darkness trembles: shivers, dissembles:
Unwilling to die.
And facile and fleet, on dusky feet,
Out of the dripping sunlight tripping,
Shadows pass by,
All sprinkled and spattered
With golden rain,
All shivered, all shattered, like dream-ghosts
scattered
By the waking brain.

The light dawns. The night mourns
And the stars shiver,
The moon pales. The loon wails
Far down the river.
And strong in the might of perfect delight,
Fearless and bold with its wealth of gold,
Stronger than sadness,
Brighter than gladness,
Mad with the madness
Of victory won—

A Song of the Sunrise 271

Above night's gloom, above life's bloom,
Higher and higher, like a passioned desire,
To the highest height of earth's blinded sight
 Rises the sun,
 And the battle is done.

Yet afar, unforgetting,
 Hid by the hill,
Night awaits the day's setting,
 Revengeful and still.

MIDSUMMER

A wide still valley, placid and deep,
Where shadows, dream-like, gather and creep,
And the sunlight lies like a smile asleep.

A gleaming mass of yellowing wheat,
That runs through the green like a golden street,
Trodden all day by light butterflies' feet.

A misty stretch of quivering corn,
That stands adroop in the sheeny morn
Like hearts with secrets too great to be borne.

Fair glimpses of flowers mid tangles of fern,
With dazzling of dew-drops that shiver and burn,
And brooks like bright fancies that turn and
return.

Far over the whole an enchantment of peace—
A light like the glint of the Golden Fleece—
A glamour of beauty too perfect to cease.

A MYSTERY

LIFE held in her hands a measure,
And swung it lightly and low;
And she said: "I will see if my pleasure
Do not outweigh my woe."
And she gathered all stingless laughter,
All loves that were lasting and sure,
All joys that left memories after,
All wealth that was wingless and pure;
She gathered all sunlight and starlight,
All thornless and fadeless flowers;
She gathered the faint light and far light
Of pangless and perfect hours;
She gathered all glimpses elysian
That never had blasted the soul,
All hopes that had held to fruition,
All talents that won to the goal,
All wisdom that never had saddened,
All truths that never had lied,
All ambitions that never had maddened,
All beauty that satisfied,
And flung them all, all in her measure,
But nothing outbalanced the pain.
Then she said: "I must add yet a treasure,
The kindest and best in my train,"

And reached out and took Death, and laid it
 All restful and calm on the scale;
Yet pain, as be ore, still outweighed it,
 And sighing she cried: "Could this fail?"
Then she reached up to merciful Heaven,
 Took down and flung over Earth's strife,
A little pale hope all unproven—
 The hope of a measureless life;
Flung it down with a doubting and wonder,
 With question and touch of disdain;
When lo, swift the light scale went under;
 Life's woe was outweighed by Life's gain.

Oh, strange, oh, most strange! If the measure
 Of all mortal days be but woe
Compared with their acme of pleasure,
 Life mused, as she swung the scale low,
Why then should it lessen Earth's sorrow,
 Why glorify Death's consequence,
To believe in a timeless to-morrow?—
 And Life held the scale in suspense.

SLEEP

Poor pain-worn mortal, dost thou weep?
Awhile thy troubled patience keep.
Night cometh surely. Thou shalt sleep.

Take up thy burden. Is the day
Too long for thy lost courage? Nay:
Night will o'ertake thee by the way.

Thou shalt not hear; thou shalt not see;
But better than death will come to thee,
For, living, thou shalt cease to be.

Better than death; for none hath told
Death's consequence. And death may hold
Undreamed-of terrors manifold.

Death may be gain, or may be woe.
Sleep hath no may-be. Sleep we know.
It is, it was, and shall be so.

No law, no conscience doth it keep
Within its unimpassioned deep.
Nor time, nor space, nor sin hath Sleep.

Sleep

To sleep is to unlive; to be
As thou hadst never been; to free
Thyself from all that maketh thee;

Nothing but nothingness to know;
To be unborn without a throe—
Uncreate at a pangless blow.

Then ye who fear, and ye who weep,
A few short hours your patience keep.
God must be good. For God made Sleep.

GOOD-BYE

We have no dearer word for our heart's friend.
To him who journeys to the world's far end
And scars our soul with going, thus we say
As unto him who but steps o'er the way—
Good-bye.

THE SETTING SUN

ONE radiant outflash of surpassing splendour,
And with the perfect peace of self-surrender,
 Without a tear,
 Without a fear,
Like some high spirit summoned from our sight,
The sun steps down into the unknown night.

TO A HURT CHILD

WHAT, are you hurt, Sweet? So am I;
Cut to the heart;
Though I may neither moan nor cry,
To ease the smart.

Where was it, Love? Just here! So wide
Upon your cheek!
Oh, happy pain that needs no pride,
And may dare speak.

Lay here your pretty head. One touch
Will heal its worst.
While I, whose wound bleeds overmuch,
Go all unnursed.

There, Sweet. Run back now to your play.
Forget your woes.
I too was sorely hurt this day;—
But no one knows.

I CAN NOT KNEEL—I CAN NOT PRAY

I CAN not kneel—I can not pray—
My dumb heart has no words to say.
My stubborn knees refuse to bend.
They kneel who pray, and to what end
Should I kneel, who can make no prayer
Out of my agonised despair?
My sorrow lies beyond the reach
Of any form of human speech.
God is so great, and I so weak;
How can so hurt a creature speak?
How move Him to undo the woe?—
Calm with the vastness of the blow,
I can but gaze with stricken eyes
Up into His imperial skies,
Drop my vain hands upon my breast,
And feel what God wills must be best.

MOTHER, MOTHER, CAN IT BE?

MOTHER, Mother, can it be
There lives any one but me
Who has known this agony?

Mother, O Mother, when they said
That thy sweetest soul had fled,
It was I who died instead.

Thee they laid away to sleep
Out of sight of all who weep.
Me unburied still they keep.

Who will show them I am dead?
Who will ask that o'er my head
Moan be made and prayers be said?

More dead am I than thou art.
Love lies spoiling at my heart.
Who dares keep us twain apart?

Dead, I know no more men's faith.
Dead, I hear not what God saith
Nothing am I but a wraith.

282 **Mother, Mother, Can it be ?**

Restless, ghost-like, to and fro,
Haunting thy dear home below,
Speechless day by day I go;

Conscious only of a pain
Rends my very soul in twain,
Robs of Heaven and makes Earth vain.

Mother, Mother, thou art where?
Art not here, and art not there.
And seeking, I but find—despair.

THE POET-HEART

ONE day, in Time's mythical ages,
Fair Life, and her bond-servant Pain,
Her workman, who works without wages,
And wiser who is than all sages
That follow the stars in her train,

Together, in friendliest fashion
Sat framing a true poet-heart;
And with infinite care and compassion,
Life chose out each charm and each passion,
And blent them with marvellous art.

Now fairer, she cried, than Earth's fairest,
This exquisite spirit shall be,
Enriched with all gifts that are rarest.
Give heed that no power thou sparest
In moulding my poet for me.

Here are days that are golden and sunny,
And a heart made to gather their light,
And hoard it as misers hoard money,
And hold it as flowers hold honey,
And tremble and thrill with delight.

Take, take, without stint, without measure,
Of all that I have that is best;
Of beauty, of love, and of pleasure
Take richly, and make at thy leisure
A poet to sing me to rest.

And so from her store-house of graces,
Fair Life, with a smile, gave the whole,
While Pain, with the stillest of faces,
And fingers whose touch left no traces,
Wrought her of these a soul.

Then he stood up and said: It is ended,
And held forth his soul to the light—
A wondrous creation, where blended
Strange shadows, and sunlight so splendid
It darkened all else to the sight.

Life took and beheld it in gladness.
Such, cried she, true poets should be,
All ecstasy, rapture, and sadness,
Created in moments of madness,
And fashioned, O Pain-God, by thee.

This, sure, is thy ripest endeavour,
Cried Life, smiling soft as she spoke.
Now poet-heart, sing on forever!—
Alas! Earth will hear the song never.
Pain touched it once more.—And it broke.

MY LETTER

FROM far away, from far away,
It journeyed swiftly night and day.
It rested not. With cruel haste
It crossed the ocean's trackless waste.
It swerved no moment in its flight
Through mist and storm and deepest night.
No mercy prompted it to stay,
No pity moved it to delay.
O'er seas that rose up to detain,
Silent as Death it sped amain.
Through cities crowding close and strong,
Undazed, untired, it fled along.
No voice cried out through all the land.
Great Heaven saw, yet stirred no hand.
No angel, kinder than the rest,
Held his white shield before my breast.
Across the land, across the sea,
Straight, swift, and sure, it came to me.
Unlet, unhindered, undeterred,
Straight, swift, and sure, it brought me word!

GOOD-NIGHT MOTHER

GOOD-NIGHT, Mother. Thou dost sleep,
While my lonely watch I keep.
Suns blaze brightly overhead;
Moons pass by with silver tread;
Night and day, and day and night
Alternate with shade and light.
But I know no change. To me
All is dark apart from thee.
Lost my life its whole of light,
When I bade thee, dear, good-night.

Good-night, Mother dear, good-night.
Soft thy slumbers be and light.
Though I call thee through the years—
Call with passion of wild tears—
May no dream of my unrest
Cross the quiet of thy breast;
May no memory of me,
Agonised on earth for thee,
Come to grieve thee or affright.
Good-night, Mother dear, Good-night.

Good-night, oh, my dearest. Sleep.
God hide from thee that I weep.

Good-night Mother

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Sleep, sleep, Mother, while I wake
Life's long night through for thy sake,
Bound up heart and soul and brain
In a timeless stretch of pain—
In a blank mid-night of sorrow
That has neither moon nor morrow.
God so wills. It must be right.
Thine the slumber; mine, the night.

PAIN WROUGHT

PAIN, Pain, the Creator Pain
Is making a poet of me.
He has flung my soul in the pit below
Where his furnace fires the fiercest glow.
He is feeding the flames with woe on woe.
My heart must thrill with every throe
That human creature can live to know.
I must suffer that I may sing.

Pain, Pain, the Creator Pain
Is working his will with me.
Ashes and ruin and havoc complete
Has he wrought of all I held dear and sweet
My soul lies scarred in the scorching heat.
My thoughts run riot with blazing feet,
Like madmen through a deserted street.
And because I suffer, I sing.

IN LIFE'S TUNNEL

BORNE by a Power resistless and unseen
We know not whither,
We look out through the gloom with troubled
mien.
How came we hither?

Darkness before and after. Blank, dim walls
On either side,
Against which our dull vision beats and falls,
Met and defied.

Shrouded in mystery that leaves no room
To guess aright,
We rush, uncertain, to a certain doom.—
When lo, the light!

SYMPATHY

FRIEND, art thou drowning? So am I.

Hold by my hand.

Nearer is my vain help, than help
From yonder land.

Friend, art thou starving? So, too, I.

Therefore I come

To thee—not to the over-fed—
To ask a crumb.

Friend, hast thou nothing? Less have I.

Yet beggared ones

Give more to those who beg than e'er
Earth's richest sons.

WEDDED, BUT NOT MATED

WEDDING bells and death-knells
Ringing forth together.
(Shines the sun? or is it dun?
Or is it stormy weather?)
Oh, woe the knells! Oh, joy the bells
That sob and shout in chime!
They bid to a marriage and funeral carriage
At one and the self-same time.

Wedding bells and death-knells
Ringing forth together.
(Be there sun or be there none,
What care I for the weather?)
They toll, they toll, for a tortured soul.
They call to a marriage feast.
One shall be wedded, one be buried,
And both by the self-same priest.

Wedding bells and death-knells
Ringing forth together.
(Falls the rain upon the pane?
'T is time for saddest weather!)
Funeral knells and marriage bells.
A shroud and a wedding ring.
A soul is wed. A soul is dead.
The bells have ceased to swing.

WHERE AM I WHILE I SLEEP?

WHERE am I while I sleep? When I lie down,
Heavy with grief for one who sleeps so well
My bitterest cry may no more waken her,
I say: Let me sleep quickly, that perchance
God send me dream of her, to ease my woe
With sweet deceit of seeing her again.
And so I lie as they lie who are dead,
My hands like folded flowers on either side,
My sad eyes closed o'er all their frozen tears,
And sleep for hope of that which sleep may bring.
Where am I then, through all the unhistoried
night?

Down what dim a'sles, unreckoned of by day,
Doth my dumb soul its trackless path pursue?—
By what far shore find gracious harbourage?
Oh, can it be that those who only sleep
And those who die, together wait in Heaven
The dawning of the day, soul welcoming soul
And claiming kinship in a wondrous world
Closed to our waking vision? Can it be
That thus on night's invisible borderland
Our spirits meet beyond Earth's cognisance,
Communing still in some strange heavenly sense

Where am I while I Sleep ? 293

That leaves its impress on returning souls—
Some touch of infinite beatitude
Beyond Life's gift—some strengthening peace
 that lends
Endurance for the day?—Oh, this alone,
Though neither memory nor dream thereof
Remain to soothe our waking, this were cause
To long for night's enfranchisement, to cry
For slumber as for Heaven, and wake at last,
Reclothed in calm, with new-won hope that death,
Even as sleep, may give what day denies.

HOPELESS

THERE lay a soul in mortal pain,
And given o'er, 't was said;
The wise men wrought and strove in vain.
Naught can restore, they said.
But Love stood by and laughed aloud.
Earth's highest skill can weave a shroud,
And nothing more, he said.

I only in the world can give
Drugs for her pain, he said.
I only can give strength to live,
Making life gain, he said.
Upon your dulness lie the sin!
Because no man doth call me in,
She 'll die amain, he said.

AN ENIGMA

To have not, is to long for with desire.
To have, is but to lose.
To lose, is to remember and expire.
How may one rightly choose?
Between a want, a loss, a lifelong pain,
What, saving death, hath any soul of gain?

BETWEEN THE LINES

O FRIEND, you have read it aright,
Just as I meant that you should.
I penned it in plain black and white,
To be so and so understood.

Yes, thus was it written, O friend,
According to every law.
I swear it, I did not intend
A syllable save what you saw.

'T was all that I willed you to read—
Resolved that but this should be seen.
Yet God! what a different creed
My mad thoughts wrote in between!

So you read only just what you could;
And the actual letter of all,
Written with very heart's blood,
Ah!—you never got it at all.

THE SONG OF THE CRICKET

YES, the world is big, but I 'll do my best
Since I happen to find myself in it,
And I 'll sing my loudest out with the rest,
Though I 'm neither a lark nor a linnet,
And strive for the goal with as tireless zest,
Though I know I may never w n it.

For shall no bird sing but the nightingale?
No flower bloom but the rose?
Shall the stars put out their torches pale
When Mars through the midnight glows?
Shall only the highest and greatest prevail?
Nay nothing seem white but the snows?

Nay, the world is so big that it needs us all
To make audible music in it.
God fits a melody e'en to the small.
We have nothing to do but begin it.
So I 'll chirp my merriest out with them all,
Though I 'm neither a lark nor a linnet!

IN THE TEENS

BUTTERFLIES, and treasure
 Of buds that crowd the green;
Sunshine without measure;
Silvern days of leisure;
Hearts too full of pleasure;—
 April—and Thirteen.

Books and half beginnings;
 Rains, with lights between;
Pangs o'er fancied sinnings;
Toils, with rose-leaved innings;
Losses matched with winnings;—
 Maytime—and Sixteen.

Dreams, with dim regretttings;
 Storms and blinding sheen;
Gains, with griefs for frettings;
Jewels, in crushed settings;
Wounds, salved with forgettings;—
 June—July—Nineteen.

THE GIFT OF SONG

WHEN I was born

God stood in Heaven, and asked: What wilt thou, Soul?

I said: The gift of Song;

I ask no more than this—that I may sing.

God sighed, and lo, Grief fell
From out high Heaven and smote me on the heart.

I cried aloud for pain, and beat my breast.

But all my cries were music, and men list,
And feasted on the sweetness of my woe.

While I, I hid my face,

And knew not day from night for agony.

O God, I cried, take back thy poisoned gift,
The gift of Song!

Let me be dumb for ever, only so

My pain have ease!

Then God did hear again, and stooped Him down

And drew the burning arrow from my side;

And silence fell on me; my pulse stood still,
My lips closed softly, and I sang no more.

But men turned from me, saying: He is dead.

SWEET MOTHER OF MY DREAMS

SWEET Mother of my dreams,
Come, come to-night!

How can I meet an added morrow,
Till thou bring solace to my sorrow,
Cleaving life's pain
By night in twain?

Sweet Mother of my dreams,
Bring love! Bring peace!

As day is death by loss of thee,
So night is life by gift of thee,
Albeit I waken,
Twofold forsaken.

Sweet Mother of my dreams,
Thank God for thee!

Not all Christ's mercy is forsown,
While I, sometimes, twixt dusk and morn,
Still touch thy hand,
In slumber-land.

COURAGE

HAST thou made shipwreck of thy happiness?

 Yet, if God please,
Some humble port awaits thee none the less,
 In nearer seas,
Where thou mayst sleep for utter weariness,
 If not for ease.

The haven dreamed of thou shalt never reach,
 Though gold its gates,
And wide and fair the silver of its beach.
 For sorrow waits
To pilot all whose aims too far outreach,
 Toward darker straits.

Yet so no soul divine thou art astray,
 On this cliff's crown
Plant thou a victor flag ere breaks the day
 Across night's brown,
And none shall guess it doth but point the way
 Where a bark went down.

AN AGNOSTIC

No disciple am I, Lord,
Doing battle for Thy word,
Girt with truth as with a sword;
Yet I follow Thee.

I am struggling in the night;
Nowhere is a point of light;
Doubt hath hid Thy cross from sight;
Yet I follow Thee.

Who can say what lies before:—
Gateways to a golden shore,
Or but death for evermore?
Yet I follow Thee.

Hope is dead in my dead heart;
Faith I had not from the start;
From all creeds I stand apart;
Yet I follow Thee.

Be Thou God, or man, or aught
Save a vision overwrought
By men's yearnings, I know naught;
Yet I follow Thee,—

Follow Thee through pain and gloom,
Though to lose Thee in the tomb.
Yet to love Thee is my doom,
And I follow Thee.

TO A WOUNDED MOTH

WHAT help have I for thee, frail thing,
Least of thy clan,
Battling 'gainst fate with bruised wing?
Albeit I hold thee in my hand,
Farther am I from thee than stand
The stars from man.

Dost thou cry out? Dost thou make moan?
I hear thee not.
Thy worst pain thou must bear alone.
The utmost pity on my part
Can drop no balsam to thy heart.
It is thy lot.

And yet, more merciful to thee
Than Heaven to us
Through year-long plaint of agony—
More kind than He, of whom in vain,
Kneeling, we beg surcease of pain,
I kill thee—thus.

LOVE NOW

You will love me the day I lie dying.
Oh, love me then living,
While yet from a full heart replying,
I give to your giving.

What gain hath my lifetime of loving,
If you pass it all by,
To give me back treble my loving
In the hour I die?

All anguish, all maddest adoring
Will be vain in that day.
Though you knelt to me then with imploring,
What word could I say?

Oh, love me then now, that it quicken
My heart's failing breath!
Why wait, till to love is to sicken
At the coldness of death?

LISTENING

I LISTEN and I listen
For one I long to greet,
And I hear the ceaseless passing
Of footsteps on the street.

I hear them coming, coming,
So straight, so sure, so fast;
And I hush my heart to hearken.
But all the feet go past.

Will it be so for ever?
As on my bed I lie,
And count the pleasures coming,
Will every one go by?

Or may it one day happen,
That when I hark no more,
Some late lone joy, unnoticed,
Will linger at my door?

FLOWERTIME WEATHER

WHEN you and I are together,
That makes for me flowertime weather,
Albeit the rain
Beats harsh on the pane,
And November lies brown on the lea.

But alas for my flowertime weather
When we are no longer together!
Though June hold the land
In the palm of her hand,
It is everywhere Winter to me.

WERE I YON STAR

WERE I yon star whose silver ray
 Turns dusk to day,
Lo, I would hide me till you came,
 Then burst in flame
Athwart the darkness on your sight,
 And die in light.

Were I yon rose whose fragrance rare
 Scents all the air,
I would not blossom till the day
 You passed this way,
Then pour my heart out in perfume
 And die in bloom.

Were I yon lark whose sunny song
 Sounds all day long,
Lo, I would hush me till you passed,
 Then wake at last,
Spread my glad wings out toward the sky,
 Sing once, and die.

MY OTHER ME

CHILDREN, do you ever
In walks by land or sea,
Meet a little maiden
Long time lost to me?

She is gay and gladsome,
Has a laughing face,
And a heart as sunny;
And her name is Grace.

Naught she knows of sorrow,
Naught of doubt or blight.
Heaven is just above her.
All her thoughts are white.

Long time since I lost her,
That other Me of mine.
She crossed into Time's shadow,
Out of Youth's sunshine.

Now the darkness keeps her,
And call her as I will,
The years that lie between us,
Hide her from me still.

My Other Me

I am dull and pain-worn,
And lonely as can be.
O children, if you meet her,
Send back my other Me!

THE WAY TO BE HAPPY

NEVER to want what one may not have—

Always to want what one may.

Never to long for the love that is lost,

Nor by night to remember the day.

To be fonder of winter than summer or spring,

To be fonder of leaves than of flowers.

To be fonder of toil than of riches and rest,

And of pain than of pleasureful hours.

To demand nothing more of the heart one loves
best,

Than the least one would grant to one's foe.

To ask no return for the gift of one's all,

Save the loan of a heartache or so.

To believe there are purpose and beauty in woe.

To believe that to fail is to win.

To stand in Hope's graveyard alone, and prefer

The Now to the What-might-have-been.

SWINGING

HIGHER, higher, farther away,
 Swing me—swing me—swing me!
Up to the tree-top, up to the sky,
 So that none other has swung so high!
I will out-fly the bees and the birds and the winds.
 I will out-soar the song of the lark.
I will reach to the clouds. I will shout in blue
 space.
I will laugh in the shadowy silver face
 Of the moon, as she sits in the dark!
Oh, higher, oh, higher, oh, farther away,
 Swing me—swing me—swing me!

See how I cleave the dim air in my flight,
 Like a dart from an unseen bow.
See how I leap through the gloom of the night,
 Like a vision of sudden and sweetest delight
 Shot through a lifetime of woe.
Upward, upward, upward alway,
 Like a spirit set free from its prison of clay,
That speeds through the ether away and away
 To a world that none else of us know—
Oh, higher, oh, higher, oh, farther away
 Swing me—swing me—swing me!

No higher? No higher? No higher?
Oh, swing me—swing me—swing me!
Can I stop so far short of my nearest desire?
Is it so childish, so vain, to aspire?
 Oh, swing me, and swing me, and swing me!
I would soar far above me. Oh, help if you love
 me!
Oh, lend me the charm of love's powerful arm!
Nay, faster and faster! Oh, farther, I pray!
Can the dream end so soon? I was more than
 half-way,
Oh, swing me! Oh, swing me! Oh, swing me!

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

VAGUE as the shadows, 'neath April-leafed trees,
Is Love's young Dream.

Light as a thistledown tossed on the breeze,
Is Love's young Dream.

Frail as a fibre of frost-woven lace—

Dim as the thought of a phantom face—

Faint as the footprints of planets through space,
Is Love's young Dream.

Oh, brilliant and cold as the moon on the snow,
Is Love's young Dream!

Oh, pulseless in bliss and unwounded in woe,
Is Love's young Dream!

Shallow as brooklets that laugh as they run,
And soulless as starlight when dawn is begun!

Oh, unlike to Love as glowworm to sun,
Is Love's young Dream!

A BIRTHDAY SONG

OUT and away, my song.
The road is long;
The time is short;
For thou by break of day, my song,
Must reach thy port.
Hie through the night!
Catch thee a star-beam for thy steed.
Saddle and curb it to thy need
With diamonded light.
Bind the whole heavens to its feet,
Then leap into thy seat
And loose it for wide flight!
Joy be thy spur and love thy whip.
For ere the moon hath bent to lave
Her pallid forehead in the wave,
Ere dawn rose-paints the mountain tip,
Ere light lies liquid on the bay
And palpitant above,
There, where my heart is, must thou be,
O song of mine, in lieu of me,
And gently lay
Thy little rhymes, all silver sweet
With tender greetings, at the feet

Of one I love
And shall love long.
Haste thee, oh, haste thee then, my song!
Near is the day.
Out and away!

RECOGNITION

As erst with thee, O Psyche, so me-seems
My wandering hands touched Love once in my
dreams.

Asleep he lay. Around us drooped the night.
No gracious star-beam lent revealing light.
I saw his form not, nor his matchless grace.

And yet, unlike to thee,
Need was not I should look him in the face.
By that one touch, all in a moment's space,
I knew him for a God!

TO THE CICADA SEPTEMDECIM

BURIED at moment of thy birth

Beneath the earth;

Hid thy life long afar

From glimpse of nearest star;

Creeping in darkness while rich seasons roll,
Year following year, above thy stunted soul;
Knowing but what the dead know in the tomb

Of silence and of gloom,

Dead, thou too, in thy present and thy past,
What call doth reach thy deadened ear at last?
What instinct bids thee yearn towards the light—

Thou, who hast known but night?

What dream dawns in thee, beautiful and bold,
Of sylvan flight in noons of shimmering gold,
Where trembling trees their fluted leaves unfold?

How should such radiant dream be thine?

Or how canst thou divine

The counting of the years?

For when their meted tale is told,

Lo, summoned straightway from the mould

By voice none other hears—

Lo, born anew,

The dream thou could'st not dream, is true!

Thy sluggish spirit wakes, spreads wings away,

And knows the Day.

To the Cicada Septemdecim 319

So, when God's time is done, may mystic call
 On my dull senses fall.
So may I, groping upward through life's night,
Go forth, new-winged, to an undreamed-of light.

THE CLOSED DOOR

KNOCK! Knock! Bide not there baffled with
spent hand.

Lo, here the threshold of thy dreamed-of goal—
Here, here, at last, fulfilment for thy soul.

Oh, knock! Oh, knock! Take not thy craven
stand,

Stilly consenting, with Fate's beggared band,
By fear for ever mulcted of thy dole.

Grasp for thy drop from Life's abundant
bowl—

Thy meted morsel of the Promised Land!
The touch withheld, how shall the latch unlock?

What hostel proffers to unchallenging guest
Friendship's full feast—Wisdom's consummate
wine?

Fool! For a lifted finger all were thine—

All, all thy soul could compass at its best.

Knock, that the door may open! Knock, oh,
knock!

A DREAM OF HAPPINESS

ONE sat and modelled a most perfect face;
And they who passed him, marvelling at its grace,
Vowed never mortal breathed so blest as he
Whose soul held dream of such divinity.
He, as he wrought, cursed God.—This was his
fate;
Conceiving Heaven, he lived without its gate.

ICARUS

BIND on thy wings, O Soul! Their eagle flight
Shall lift thee to the Sun. For but one hour
Glory, thou too, in superhuman power.
Enraptured soar to Hope's extremest height;
Confront unblenching the supernal light;
Forget thine insufficiency of dower,
And quicken all thy being into flower
Ere blasted by intolerable Might.
What though thou perish in the self-same breath
That numbers thee mid Heaven's effulgent host?
What though thy victory's award be death,
If, dying, thou attain thine uttermost?
Were not that brief immortal moment worth
A wingless lifetime on the level Earth?

INTO MY LIFE SHE CAME

INTO my life she came
One golden day,
Softly as blossoms come
Into the May.

I only knew that she was there
By the fragrance in the air.

Into my heart she came
One day of days,
Stilly, as on night's dark
God's stars outblaze.
I only knew that she was there
By the glory everywhere.

LIKE A GARDEN OF MARVELLOUS MID-SUMMER BLOOMS

LIKE a garden of marvellous midsummer blooms
In a tangle of twilights and sunfloods and
glooms—

A riot of raptures in scarlet and blue
With blisses of purple and gold breaking
through—

A temple to passion, with mossbanks for stairs,
And colours for anthems, and perfumes for
prayers,

Where all longings, all dreams, all desires that be
Exhale in the breath of each blossoming tree,—
Such, O Love, is my heart's love—my heart's
love for thee!

Like a mist, fallen soft as a sleep o'er the land,
A peace all-compelling, too vast to withstand,
Wherein dreams lie undreamed and petitions
unspoken—

An impalpable hush from Nirvana evoken,
Holding passion and sense in divinest control
As by touch of God's finger laid white on the
soul—

Garden of Midsummer Blooms 325

A holiest calm, a supreme ecstasy
Where Heaven begins and Earth ceases to be—
Such, O Love, is my soul's love—my soul's love
for thee.

CAGED

It was born behind bars, but it knew it had wings,
And it felt God had meant it for happier things;
And it sang of the joys that it never had known—
Of fetterless flights over fields flower-strown;
Of the green of the forest and gold of the wheat:
Of the thrill of the tree-top, just touched by its
feet;

Of the feel of a lily-leaf, brushed by its breast,
And the splash of a raindrop, caught on its
crest.

It sang of the beauty, the rapture of flying,
The palpitant air to its heart-beats replying,
Naught over, naught under, save limitless blue
And the music of wing-strokes, rhythmic and
true.

It sang, and men said that its song was good;
But not one understood.

Then a bird of the fields they brought in from a
snare,
And a day and a night held it prisoner there.
And a night and a day, unbelieving, distraught,
With impassible fate for its freedom it fought,

Though it bled at the breast blindly beating the
bars
As if strength of desire should force way to the
stars;
Till men pitied, and said: "It was free its life
long;
Who could bid it endure but a day of such wrong?"
And they flung wide the door, and the bird,
 flashing through,
Swept away, like a leaf in a gale, from their view.

Then the other, behind the closed bars of its fate,
Once again sang its heart out—its need, co-create,
Of the broad and the boundless. In passionate
 song
It besought men to right for one day its life's
 wrong—
To bestow for a day, or for one only hour,
The leave to make proof of its God-given power;
For one hour only to float on free wings
In the world where its soul lived—the world of
 best things,
Of commensurate effort and gain, of desire,
Unlinked from despair, mounting higher and
 higher
Till lost in attainment—the world of clear visions,
True measures, high aims, and untrammelled
 decisions—
The world God had made it for. So its song rose,
Ecstatic, tumultuous, thrilled with wild woes

And delicious complainings, until the last note
Broke off in an exquisite cry in its throat.
And men listened, and said that the song was
good.

But not one understood.

MY FRIEND

WITH a forehead serene and the gait of a queen
She is threading life's sorrowful maze.
Of her blessed evangels is none other sign
Than that lift of her head, and a courage divine
In the exquisite calm of her gaze.

But to walk where she leads is to hold by high
creeds;
To feel stirrings of wings in the soul;
To make spurs of one's fetters and moons of
midnights;
Of dim deserts make Pisgahs, of falls eagle-
flights
That shall sweep at one stretch to the goal.

And remembering her is afar to recur
To vows made by her side unafraid;
To grow strong with her strength; to be girt
with her grace,
And to pattern one's soul by the look in her face,
To receive Truth's supreme accolade.

IN AN ECLIPSE

WHENE'ER in the course of our daytime of doing,
While high overhead stands the sun,
The forced night of inaction, our footsteps pur-
suing,
Bids halt, though our best be undone,
Oh, then, if we faint not for grief or surprise,
All the stars that we steer by will show in God's
skies.

REMEMBRANCE

It lies on our life like the stars on the sea,
 Like dew on the face of the flower,
Like shade on the sun-dazzled stretch of the lea,
Like snow on the storm-beaten boughs of the tree,
 Like light on the wings of the shower.

It comes as comes faith to the nun on her knees,
 Or day-dawn to timorous sky.
It thrills through our souls as in summer the
 breeze
Descends on the slumbering green of the trees,
 And stirs them to trembling reply.

From iris-hued realms of the shadowy past,
 Its wonderful flight it comes winging,
With odours of blossoms that drooped in the
 blast,
With star-beams that vanished when skies were
 o'ercast,
 And music that hushed in the singing.

And scars of old sorrows, ghosts of dead pain
 That left us all faint and weak hearted,

With droppings of tears that were once as hot
rain,
These too doth it bring us, and bringing again,
Reveals that their sting is departed.

It links the pale past and the present in one
With ladders of vacillant light,
Along which, dim-footed and opal-robed, run
Hand in hand with to-day all the days that are
done,
Crowned each with its crown of delight.

It cleaves with a transient rainbow ray
The clouds of Earth's tempest-torn places,
And does for us, living, what Death does one day,
When bending above us he kisses away
Life's woe from our weariful faces.

SEMELE

GREAT Jove, great god of gods, awful and
absolute,
If Jove indeed thou be, cast off this disrepute
Of human likeness, this poor mask of mortal
youth.
Put on thy godliness. Proclaim thee Jove in
truth!
Robed in tempestuous pomp, the lightning for
thy crown,
Rend the obscuring skies! As king of kings come
down,
Thy sovereignty about thee like a living flame,
And woo me as gods woo, to my resplendent
shame!

Grant me this only grace. Behold, I give thee
all,
As blossoms give their bloom at summer's secret
call,
As birds outpour their songs at morning's
signalled light,
As stars first wax aglow at whisper of the night.

Beneath thy feet my throne is. Heaven is where thou art.

Thy pulses' feeblest count is a blood-beat of my heart.

I breathe but by thy breath. I am but what thou wilt,

My being lost in thee as wine in wine is spilt.

Then match me love for love, or grant me only this—

To know my soul exchanged for an immortal's kiss!

Oh, see! Oh, hark!—A crash! An all-devouring blaze!

Almighty Jove, 't is thou! And Death around thee plays!

Lover divinely awful, oh, aloof! aloof!

Of a weak earthly loom is spun my heart's frail woof.

In mercy veil thyself. Naught but an eagle's eye

May look upon the sun's unshadowed majesty.
Give me not all I asked! Thy full magnificence Reserve for Heaven alone. Beware Earth's impotence.

Smitten with too much splendour as with too much pain

My spirit slips its leash. Oh, vain prayer prayed in vain!

Thy thunders drown my cries in their stupendous
roll.
The flaming of thy passion sears my shrinking
soul.
Thy fires have wrapped me round as in a burning
shroud.
I die—I die of thee! O lover, lightning-browed,
Withdraw thy glory! Lo! I sink upon the sod!
Love but as mortals love! Love not as loves a
god!

THE BEND OF THE ROAD

Oh, that bend of the road, how it baffles, yet
beckons!

What lies there beyond—less or more than heart
reckons?

What ends, what begins, there where sight fails
to follow?

Does the road climb to heaven, or dip to the
hollow?

What glory of greenness, what lights interlacing,
What softness of shadow, what bounty of spacing,
What refreshment of change—aye, what beauty
Elysian

The sweep of that curve may deny to the vision!
Oh, my soul yearns for sight! Oh, my feet long
to follow,

Swift-winged with sweet hope as with wings of a
swallow!

Though lonely the way, void of song, void of
laughter,

I must go to the end—I must know what comes
after.

THE HIDDEN BROOK

So flows my love along your life, O friend—
A whispered song, with neither break nor end,
Outbreathed wherever your dear footsteps tend.

Albeit you listen not, are not aware
Of any music throbbing on the air,
Still my full heart goes singing to you there.

Content, although the way be long to run
And closed for ever from the moon and sun,
With emerald dusks and opal dawns all one—

Content, content, if Heaven but grant this meed,
That you may drink in any hour of need.

A LAST MESSAGE

DEAR, I lie dying, and thou dost not know—
Thou, whom of all the world I love the best!—
And wilt not know, until I lie at rest
With lips for ever closed, and lids dropped low.
O Love—O Love—I can not leave thee so!—
Can not, still undivined, still unexpressed,
Unheeding to the last my heart's behest,
Dumb into the Eternal Silence go!
What reck I in this moment of disgrace?
Albeit the whole world hear what my heart saith,
I cry aloud to thee across all space.
To thee—to thee—I call with my last breath!
O Love, lean forth from out thy dwelling place!
Listen, and learn—I loved thee, Love, till death.

IN THE FORUM OF JUSTICE

PASS. Pass. Pass. Thou hast had thine hour
To sow in and reap. Is it thistle for flower?
'T is the seed is at fault, e'en though Jove stayed
the shower;
Make way for thy comrade with double thy
dower.

Halt. Halt. Halt. There was given thee grace
To begin with the best and their records efface
Had thy sandals been winged. Step down from
the race.

One swifter than thou art would run in thy place.

Cease. Cease. Cease. Thou hast had thy
chance.

Must a Pallas attend thee, to ward off mischance?
Let fall thy vain weapon. A thousand advance
To rush on and win with thy pitiful lance.

FATE

A wide bare field 'neath blinding skies,
Where no tree grows, no shadow lies,
Where no wind stirs, where no bee flies.

A roadway, even, blank and white,
That swerves not left, that swerves not right,
That stretches, changeless, out of sight.

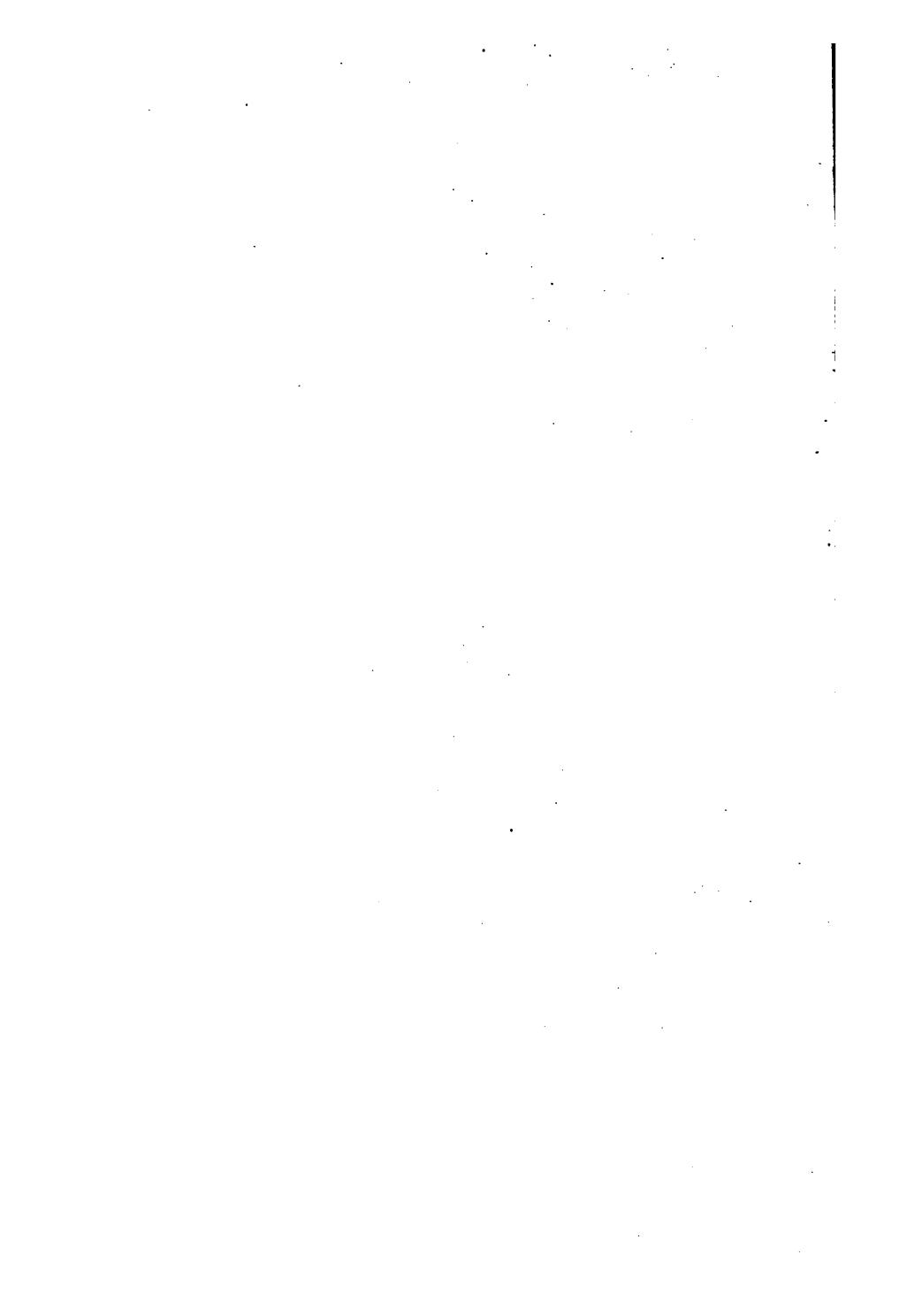
Footprints midway adown its dust;
Two lagging, leaden feet that just
Trail on and on, because they must.

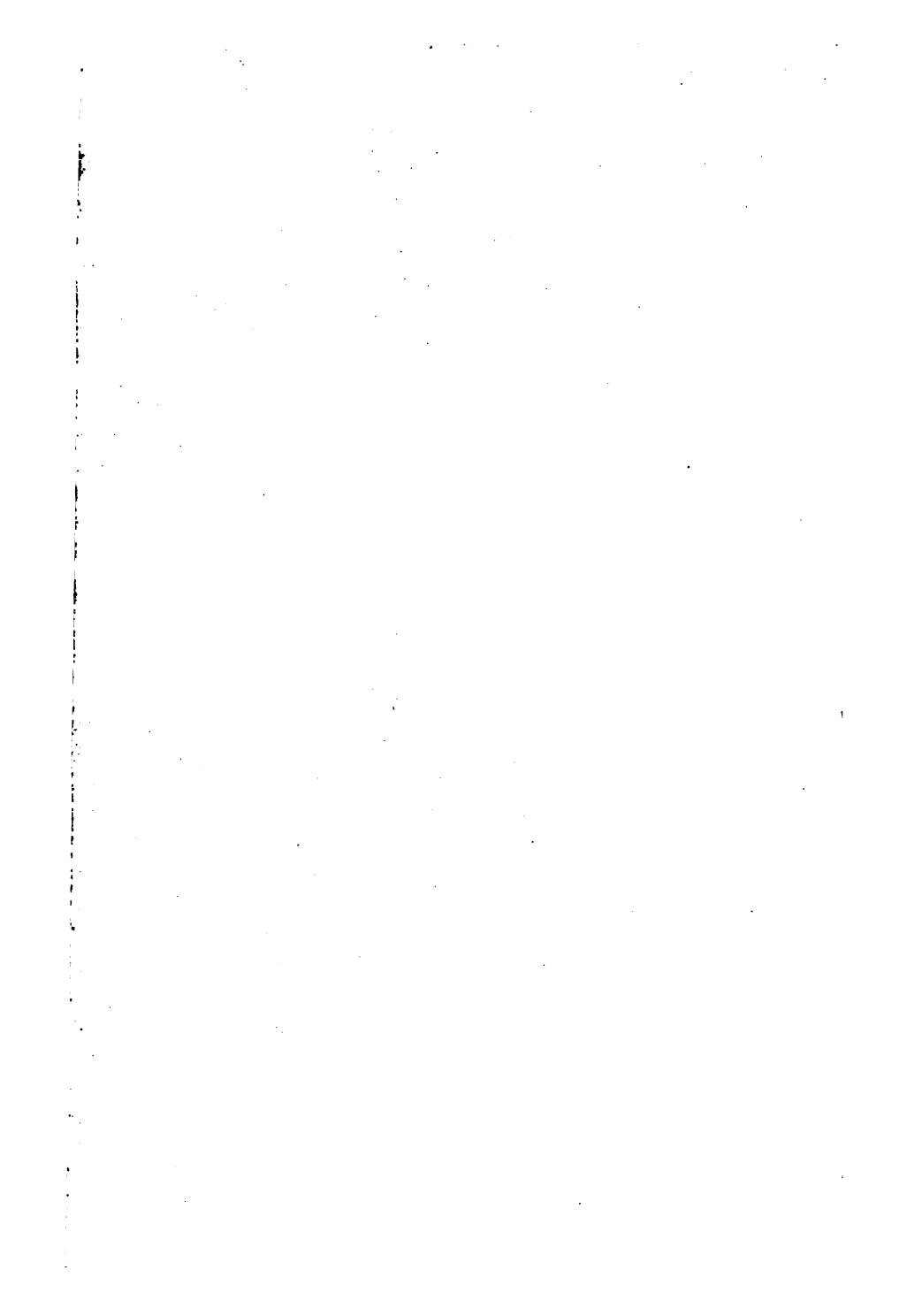
TO MY FATHER

As the poorest may borrow some treasure
To adorn what is meagre or bare,
So a memory loved beyond measure
I lay on my book, with the prayer,
Its dear presence all fault may efface,
And a lingering touch of its grace
May ennable my words unaware.









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